

# cigar aficionado

THE GOOD LIFE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

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BIG  
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**80**  
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SHARK TANK  
GOOD GUY

**JAMES  
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GUARDING  
THE GALAXY



# SAVOR THE

## LUXURY OF OVER

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**BACARDÍ**



# 150 YEARS

## OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

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◆ GRAN RESERVA ◆



**BACARDÍ® 8 AÑOS RUM**

Each batch of BACARDÍ 8 Años is made from a selection of reserve rums, barrel-aged for a minimum of 8 years, to craft a refined flavor with prominent wood notes alongside apricot, nutmeg and butterscotch. Excellent neat or on the rocks, this golden sipping rum is also an exceptional base for classic cocktails like the Rum Old Fashioned.

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MAESTRO DE RON RUM
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LIVE PASSIONATELY. DRINK RESPONSIBLY.

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# 150 YEARS OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

◆ GRAN RESERVA ◆





THE LINCOLN  
MOTOR COMPANY



When you have a great sense of direction, and the confidence to get lost.  
THAT'S CONTINENTAL









MY FATHER  
CIGARS

*Don Pepín García*  
FAMILY



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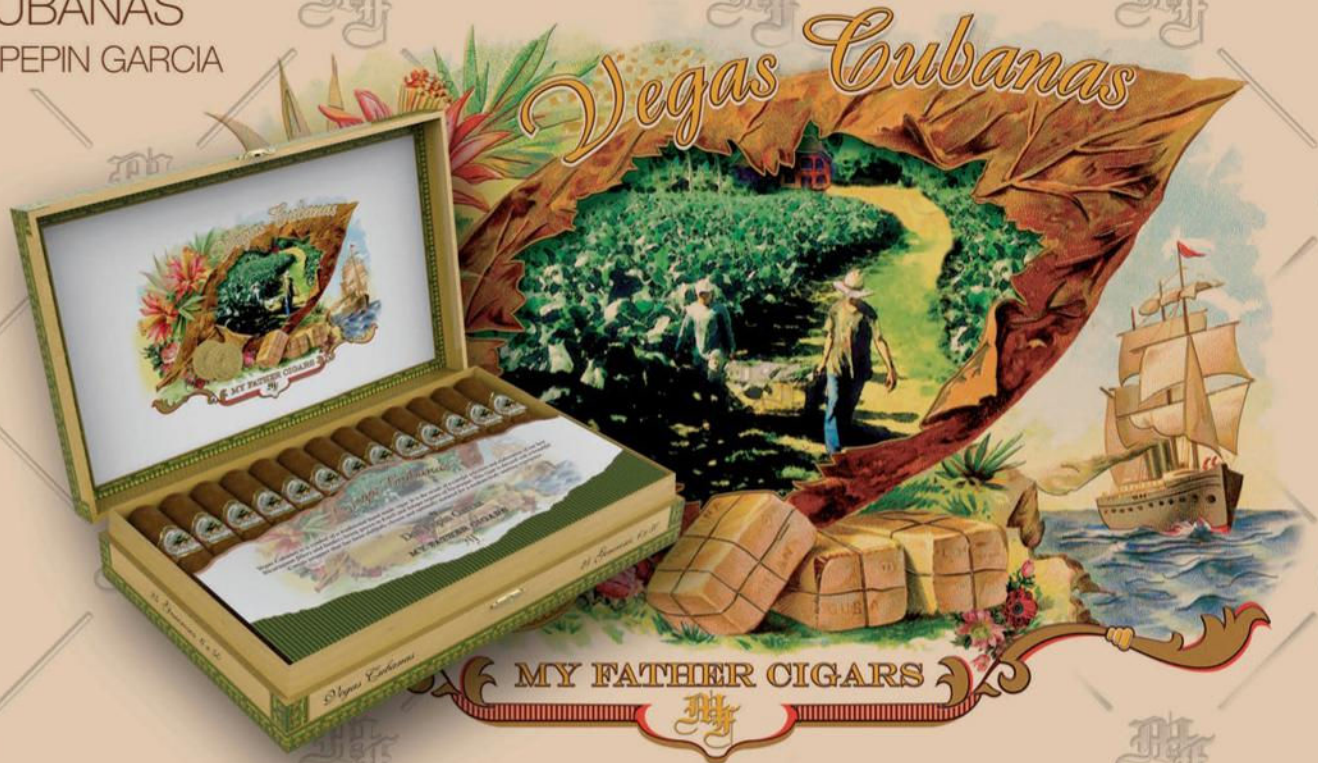
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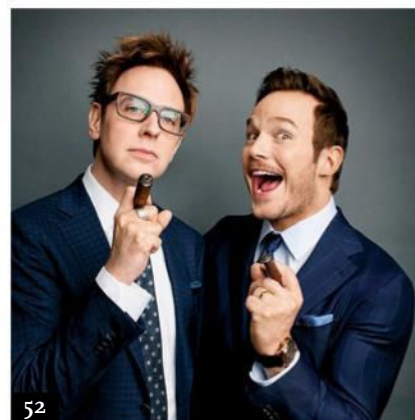
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photograph by Jeff Lipsky





# STANDING ROOM ONLY

THE ORIGINAL SHORT-FORMAT CIGAR

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CIGAR

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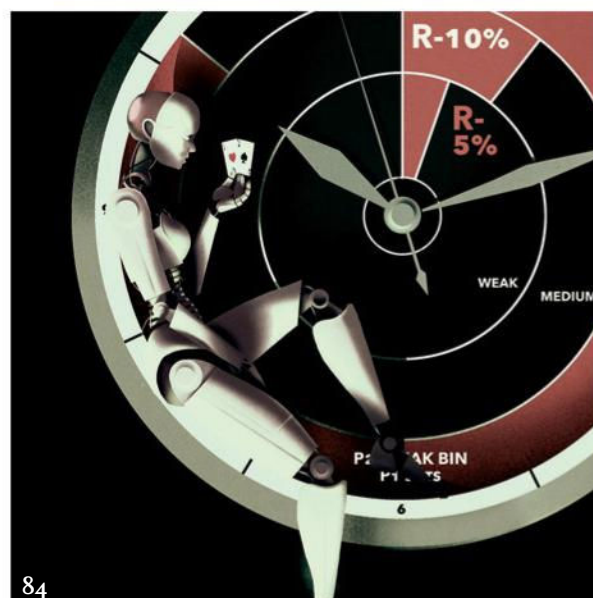
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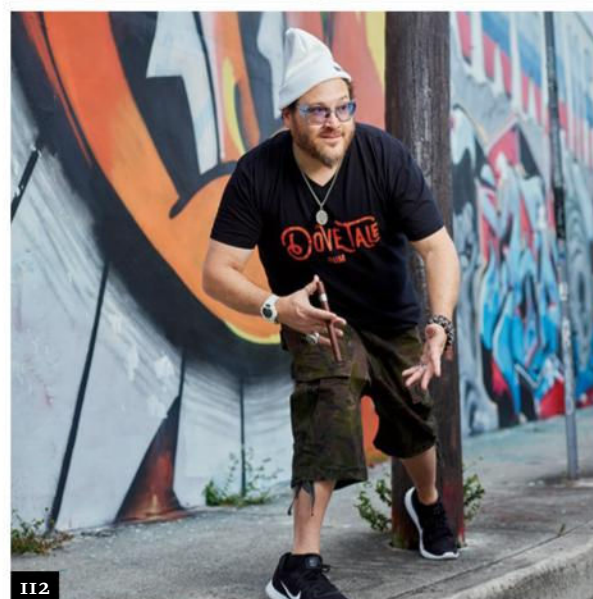
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# highlights

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This issue's tasting shows how non-Cuban cigars can stand toe-to-toe with cigars from Havana. All of our 93-pointers are made outside of Cuba. Macanudo's Inspirado Orange, which is made in Honduras, led all Churchills. Nicaragua's Placencia Alma Fuerte Generacion V, a box-pressed Salomon, tied with the Dominican-made Ashton Heritage Puro Sol Belicoso No. 2 for tops in the figurado group. Nicaragua's My Father The Judge Grand Robusto sits alone atop the grande category. Guardian of the Farm Apollo Selección de Warped, which is also from Nicaragua, stood out as the best corona with a score of 92 points. Two Altadis-made cigars, the Montecristo Artisan Series Batch 1 Toro and Romeo y Julieta Rare 11 Years Old Toro, led the corona gordas with scores of 92 points, while another Altadis smoke, the Romeo Añejo by Romeo y Julieta Robusto, led all robustos with 91.



## TOP CHURCHILL

### MACANUDO INSPIRADO ORANGE CHURCHILL

Initially released in Europe, this brand arrived in the United States last year and is draped in a Honduran wrapper grown in the San Agustín valley of Olancho.

HONDURAS

93



## TOP FIGURADO

### PLASENCIA ALMA FUERTE GENERACION V

The Plasencias, best known for their tobacco-growing talents, reached into their vast library of aged Nicaraguan leaf to blend this cigar, which tied with an Ashton for best figurado.

NICARAGUA

93



## TOP GRANDE

### MY FATHER THE JUDGE GRAND ROBUSTO

This thick smoke is wrapped in Sumatra-seed leaf grown in Ecuador and includes filler tobaccos that were grown in Nicaragua by the Garcia family.

NICARAGUA

93



## TOP CORONA

### GUARDIAN OF THE FARM APOLLO SELECCIÓN DE WARPED

A collaboration between Warped Cigars and Casa Fernandez, this Nicaraguan puro is covered in a Corojo '99 wrapper grown in the Jalapa Valley.

NICARAGUA

92



## TOP CORONA GORDA

### MONTECRISTO ARTISAN SERIES BATCH 1 TORO

This limited-edition cigar, blended by members of Grupo de Maestros, tied with the Romeo y Julieta Rare 11 Years Old Toro for best corona gorda.

DOM. REP.

92



## TOP ROBUSTO

### ROMEO AÑEJO BY ROMEO Y JULIETA ROBUSTO

Wrapped in dark, oily broadleaf grown in Connecticut, this cigar is said to only use vintage tobaccos from bumper crops in its blend.

DOM. REP.

91



REFINEMENT REMASTERED.  
Extra Añejo Tequila Meets Cognac Casks



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TEQUILA

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GIGA 5



XJ9 Professional



E8



A9

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## editors' note

### The Cigar Industry's Day in Court

**M**ark August 30 on your calendar. That's when the American cigar industry will get its day in court.

On that day, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia is scheduled to hear the lawsuit filed by The Cigar Rights of America, Cigar Association of America and the International Premium Cigar and Pipe Retailers Association against the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. These three organizations—which represent cigar smokers, cigar companies and cigar retailers—have taken up the fight against the FDA to oppose its Final Deeming Rule, which places severe limits on how cigars are made and sold in the United States.

The people who champion the cigar industry claim—accurately—that the FDA's Rule threatens the livelihood of cigar companies, imposes unreasonable demands and violates the First and Fifth Amendments.

The court date is an important one, for the FDA rules as they are written place handcuffs on cigarmakers, limiting their ability to function as normal businesses. The limits include severe restrictions on creating new products, the upcoming requirement to place onerous warning labels on cigar packaging and advertisements and draconian limitations on how cigars can be sold. Creating new cigars used to be limited only by the creativity of the maker and the desires of consumers. Now new product creation lies in the hands of the U.S. government, which requires hefty regulation fees and long testing protocols before a new cigar can come out.

And as bad as it is for existing companies, it's even worse for anyone wishing to enter the business. Due to the FDA restrictions, any entrepreneur wanting to start a cigar brand would face costly and time-consuming restrictions on getting that cigar brand on store shelves. The rules were created by politicians without a clear vision of how premium cigars are

made or enjoyed, and without any idea of how many of the companies making such products are small and entrepreneurial.

These FDA regulations simply cannot continue. The premium cigar business has too much to lose.

The court date has been a long time coming—this lawsuit was filed in July 2016. Originally the court date was set for July of this year, but in March the date was pushed back. The reason, according to court documents, was to give the new management of the FDA time to get accustomed to the issues about the case.

Our hopes are that this lawsuit succeeds—or that the cigar industry's request for a Motion for Summary Judgment, made in February, results in the elimination of these FDA restrictions, and the much-needed exemption for premium, handmade cigars.

The people who make handmade cigars are the living embodiment of the American dream, hardworking individuals who have toiled to create products that we all enjoy. The law allows them to make and sell cigars. They pay more than their share of taxes. The only risk they should face is that of free and fair competition from other companies—not from their own government.

That's the very least any business owner in the United States can ask.

We look forward to August 30.

MARVIN R. SHANKEN  
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

DAVID SAVONA  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR





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*andalusian bull*

cigar aficionado

#1 CIGAR OF 2016



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ME  
0** NICARAGUA  
505

# THE 505<sup>ER</sup> KNOWS WHEN TO BE BOLD AND WHEN TO BE BOLDER

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# out of the humidor

Dear Marvin,

It is with great pleasure and happiness that I received my first edition of CIGAR AFICIONADO here in Qatar. The information mentioned in this valuable magazine is of great importance, keeping us updated despite being on the other side of the world. We had a big cigar-puffing event around the pool reading the news in February's edition and sharing our knowledge.

*Hady Sam Peter Aouad*

*Doha, Qatar*

Dear Marvin,

The story about James Donovan ["The Negotiator," April 2017] was downright fascinating until the last section. Here President Obama's surrender to Cuba was extolled as something positive, the result of expert negotiation and somehow a great step forward in something or other. The U.S. got nothing out of this: the path to freedom for Cuban refugees was cut off, the communists got trade, food, money, everything their own failure of an economy can't produce, and we got nothing.

*Charles Knapp*

*Traverse City, Michigan*

Dear Marvin,

As always, I enjoyed your journal, and was impressed by Steve Harvey's philanthropic bent ["Man on the Move," April 2017]. He's doing two things absolutely right to ensure success—having a clear sense of what he wants to do and acting from strong, compelling values. As someone who's spent the past 35 years advising people of wealth on wise giving, I have a few observations.

The first is to pass along the knowledge of Dr. Buster Alvord, the late, admired Seattle philanthropist and nationally known pathologist. When he received a regional award for his giving, he said, "I've done more than 3,000 autopsies, and I think I can say with assuredness that you can't take it with you." The second is that extensive research shows that people who give generously are happier and live longer than others.

Some specific advice for Mr. Harvey:

Develop a clear vision of what his giving can do—the actual outcome of his giving. For example, "If I succeed, every young man will have the resources to make good decisions ensuring a



"I was impressed by Steve Harvey's philanthropic bent. He has a clear sense of what he wants to do and is acting from strong, compelling values."

*—Stuart R. Grover, Tacoma, Washington*

successful and productive life." Think big, but within reality.

Figure out the most cost-effective way to structure his giving—what is the most good he can do with the money he gives?

Stop equating suits passed up with the good he does. Think of what is needed to achieve the goals he has set for himself, without regard for the sacrifices he makes.

Enlist others to help. He can't do it alone. He has friends and contacts to amass a substantial fund. And ask big—to become part of his 'team,' the entry level should be high—like \$1 million.

Get advice from great mentors—the Bill Gateses and Warren Buffetts of the world.

*Stuart R. Grover*

*Tacoma, Washington*

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Dear Marvin,

I am a longtime subscriber and love your magazine. The articles are generally well written and informative (full disclosure: my brother is a frequent contributor) and I also enjoy the artwork contained in the advertisements.

As for some of the politics: not so much. A case-in-point is the decision to publish the letter from a certain Mr. Oakes in the April edition where said individual insulted the prior president and typed the words "socialist" three times, and "communist" twice, all in a diatribe against efforts by the federal government to regulate the cigar industry.

When someone abuses a political term, he or she cheapens oneself.

Just as President Trump is not a fascist, Obama is not a communist/socialist.

One also insults the memories of the countless and faceless and nameless souls who perished under the yoke of totalitarianism when words are carelessly and thoughtlessly used.

As I believe Freud once said: Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

*Kevin J. Rothstein*

*Oceanside, New York*

Dear Marvin,

As a fan of this magazine and an appreciator of fine cigars, I was surprised to read the fact-challenged broadside attack on President Obama in the April 2017 letters section from J. Bradley Oakes of California.

I read CIGAR AFICIONADO for the thoughtful interviews, insightful cigar reviews and informative new product features. I don't read it for hyper-partisan takes on politics. While I also enjoyed your Editors' Note on government meddling, I found it gratuitous to print Oakes' letter. But since you opened the door, I thought I would provide a reasonable response.

If readers of this magazine have one common denominator it is the love of a good cigar. And for American cigar aficionados, the last frontier of cigar nirvana is Cuba. The "outgoing administration" has done more to open this market to American cigar enthusiasts than any other administration. For that alone, readers of this magazine should be respectful, if not thankful.

On the domestic economic front, the "abusive communist platform" Oakes rails against provided years of steady economic growth including the creation of 11.3 million jobs, a bull market where the Dow increased 140 percent and a revitalization of the American auto industry and the financial system.

To claim "socialist overreach" you'd have to ignore this reality.

*David Di Martino*

*Silver Spring, Maryland*



# Bellas Artes

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AJ FERNANDEZ  
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Former New York City Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, pro Branden Grace, radio star Rush Limbaugh and Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of CIGAR AFICIONADO, puffing cigars at Old Palm in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. They shot 16 under to win the ninth annual Els for Autism Pro-Am by one stroke.

# Golfing For A Fine Cause

SUPERSTARS OF GOLF STAR IN \$1 MILLION ELS FOR AUTISM PRO-AM

BY DAVID SAVONA

Rory McIlroy strode across the practice green, a compact vision of muscle and sinew in a red and black shirt. He clasped hands warmly with Ernie Els, the legendary South African golfer who seemed twice his size, three major championships shaking hands with four. Around them were golfers whose names were familiar to any fan of the game—Rickie Fowler, Camilo Villegas, Louis Oosthuizen, K.J. Choi. And there stood the grandest golf champion of all, Jack Nicklaus, the owner of a record 18 major championships. He was chatting with Justin Thomas, one of the hottest young players in the game, who was a month shy of his 24th birthday at the time.

Nicklaus made a swinging motion as he chatted, rotating his hips, giving some instruction to the attentive and young Thomas, lessons of the master being handed down. Old school talking to new school.

This assembly of golf royalty was the gathering at the start of the ninth annual Els for Autism Pro-Am, held on March 13 at Old Palm Golf Club in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. Twenty-five teams of amateurs, many of them top executives of some of the largest spirits concerns in the United States, were preparing to take to the course, each team paired with one of the professional golfers. The event raised \$1,015,000 for the Els for Autism Foundation.

The Pro-Am, which was founded by Els and Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of CIGAR AFICIONADO and *Wine Spectator* magazines, has funded a modern school for autistic children, in Jupiter, Florida, called the Els Center of Excellence. The site is not only a school, but a hub of education and information for autism, one of the most serious disorders affecting children in the world today.

The Pro-Am has raised more than \$8 million in its nine-year history, including a dramatic \$1 million netted in one stroke in 2016 when Rickie Fowler smacked a hole in one at the course's 19th hole. That jackpot helped spur the expansion of the Center, and





Shanken and a large crowd watch as Els tries to make a \$2 million hole in one at Old Palm.



Golfing legend Jack Nicklaus on the course.



Rory McIlroy stripping a shot during the tourney.



Hazel Shanken getting a high five from Cameron Tringale after a shot during the Els for Autism Pro-Am.

## ELS FOR AUTISM TIMELINE

### March 2008

Ernie Els, after winning the Honda Classic, reveals publicly for the first time that his son Ben has autism.

### April 2008

Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of CIGAR AFICIONADO, reaches out to Els with the idea of creating a pro-am to raise money to fight autism.

### March 2009

The first Els for Autism Pro-Am is held with a star-studded field of players including Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Greg Norman and Raymond Floyd. The event raises more than \$500,000.



### March 2014

The Shanken and Els families break ground in Jupiter, Florida, on the Els Center of Excellence. "It's been a long journey," said Ernie Els at the time. "Last year I said we have to show these people who are giving so much that this thing is a reality."

### August 2015

The first students are welcomed to the Els Center of Excellence.



### March 2016

Rickie Fowler hits a hole in one on the 19th hole at Old Palm Golf Club to win \$1 million for the Els for Autism charity. The money allows for the funding of the upper school at the Els Center of Excellence. "I can't put into words how much it means," says Liezl Els at the time.

### March 2017

The ninth annual Els for Autism Pro-Am raises more than \$1 million, bringing the total funds raised by the event in its lifetime to more than \$8 million.





Twenty five teams, each with a golf star and three amateurs, ready themselves for a day at Old Palm Golf Club in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida on March 13.



The Pro-Am has raised more than \$8 million for the Els Center of Excellence in Jupiter, Florida.

beginning in September, 300 special needs children (increased from the previous 120) will be attending the Center.

This year the hole-in-one contest returned at the end of the match, but the rules had been changed. The insurers, who had paid the \$1 million in 2016, wanted to make a repeat tougher, so this year they allowed only five golfers to take a shot at the prize, which was doubled to \$2 million. The five attempts, made against a hefty breeze, failed to find the pin.

But the lack of another miracle shot couldn't cloud a day of high spirits, great golf shots and good fun. The course was covered with drink and

cigar stations, ensuring the golfers wouldn't go thirsty or without a fine cigar. Drinks were provided by Bacardi, Brown-Forman, Campari, Ketel One, Moët Hennessy and Pernod Ricard, with cigars by Alec Bradley, La Flor Dominicana, My Father Cigars and Padrón.

The event was won by the team led by Marvin R. Shanken, pro golfer Branden Grace, former New York City Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and radio personality Rush Limbaugh. "I had one of the best times I've ever had in a golf tournament," said Limbaugh. "Sometimes things go your way," said Shanken, who joked that Limbaugh hit the ball so well that "he can



The creation of the Upper School (above), which will admit students in September.

give up radio and turn pro."

Second place went to the team with golf legend Nicklaus, as well as Larry Schwartz, Steve Rust and Jeff Ivey. "I haven't held a trophy in 10 years," said Nicklaus.

Third place went to Charl Schwartzel, who played with Wayne Chaplin and John Esposito.

The star golfers who played were Branden Grace, Rory McIlroy, Rickie Fowler, Cameron Tringale, Camilo Villegas, Louis Oosthuizen, Justin Thomas, Jack Nicklaus, Thomas Aiken, Andrew Johnston, Jamie Lovemark, Ernie Els, Brooks Koepka, Ian Baker-Finch, Alex Cejka, K.J. Choi, Daniel Berger, Bryson DeChambeau, Luke Donald, Ken Duke, Tony Finau, Keegan Bradley, Charl Schwartzel and Kylie Reifers.

Among the teams were executives from Bacardi, Brown-Forman, Charmer Sunbelt, Deutsch & Sons, Diageo, Moët Hennessy, Pernod Ricard, Republic National Distributing, Richemont Group, SAP, Southern Glazer's and Stonehage Fleming.

To find out more about the Els for Autism Foundation, visit [elsforautism.org](http://elsforautism.org) ❖



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# good life guide

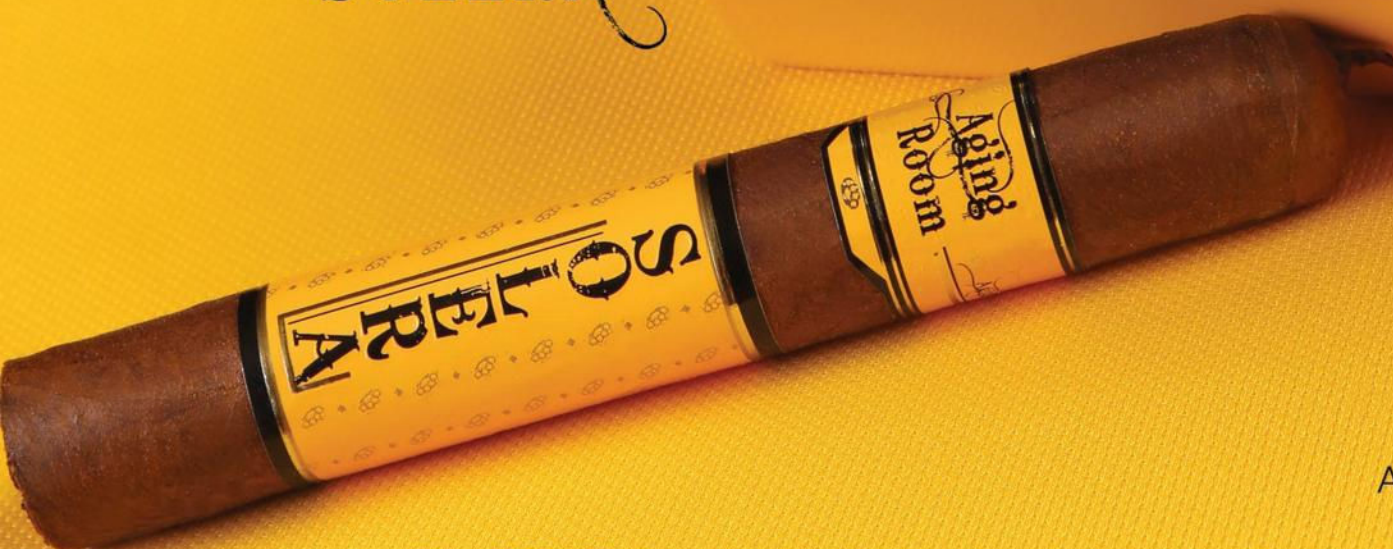
Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

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## Soft-Flame Lighters

In the age of indoor smoking bans, the outdoor utility of windproof, jet-flame lighters is undeniable. But the 21st century aficionado would be mistaken to overlook situations in which the soft-flame variety can add a degree of accuracy—and style—to the cigar-smoking experience. It also avoids the undesirable charred notes of a torch gone wrong. Thankfully, the cigar accessories market is ripe with a range soft-flame lighters with designs fit for any occasion.

Take, for instance, Caseti's Lumos (center, \$75), an ultra-slim soft flame designed for mobility. Less than one-eighth of an inch thick, the Lumos slides easily into trousers of even the slimmest cut, but still produces a robust yellow flame capable of lighting large-ring-gauge smokes. The one-press igniter has an easy-action trigger, which means you can take your time slowly roasting the foot of your premium hand-rolled without straining your thumb. The flame is sparked by an electro-quartz ignition that—unlike a flint lighter—does not need to be replaced.

Several soft-flame designs have proven durability for puffing in the elements. The Colibri Julius (right, \$125) lighter is all about power—even when compared with jet-flames. Made of tough metal alloy with an

easy-grip diamond pattern exterior, the effortless roll bar ignites a double-flame that's sturdy enough to compete with gusting winds on the beach or golf course. For added range, the Colibri positions one flame upright and the second at a 45-degree angle, which combine to generate a large, all-encompassing flame.

If the elements aren't a factor and the intention is simply to impress, the quintessential Ligne 2 lighter from S.T. Dupont is never a bad choice. The Parisian company has been producing luxury goods since the late 19th century and has become a symbol of quality with its sturdy and dependable lighters. But the real showcase here is the exuberance of elegance displayed by the Ligne 2's classic precious-metal finishes, available in silver, palladium and gold (as pictured, left, \$950). There's also, of course, the unmistakable “ping” of an S.T. Dupont lighter when it's flipped open and ready for ignition. Beyond the standard finishes, the Ligne 2 line is also popular with collectors for its special-edition offerings. Designs have been inspired by the likes of Leonardo da Vinci, The Rolling Stones and James Bond.

Visit [colibri.com](http://colibri.com), [st-dupont.com](http://st-dupont.com) and [visolproducts.com](http://visolproducts.com)

—Blake Droesch





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## Aston Martin DB11

**M**uch like the State of California, the drought at Aston Martin is finally over, something we discovered while taking the long-awaited DB11 for a drive through the rain-soaked mountain passes east of San Diego. The British maker, long known as the ride of choice for superspy James Bond, has gone through some tough times in recent years, but with substantial new funding in hand, the all-new DB11 marks the start of an unprecedented product assault that will see at least seven new products roll out in the years ahead. If the DB11 is any indication of what's coming, Aston is in for a glorious future.

Visually, the new coupe is a stunner. Of course, there's that classic, yawning Aston grille that anchors a sculpted body that is both sensuous and sinister, much like so many of the *femmes fatale* James Bond has faced off with over the decades. The car's predecessor, the DB9, has been hailed as one of the most beautiful sports cars ever, but we'd argue that the DB11 (starting at \$214,820) is even more of a stunner. The luscious look carries into the cabin, with its supple blend of leather, wood and metal finishes. The instrument panel is anchored, meanwhile, by a new infotainment display that is far easier to use than in previous Aston offerings. Credit the new relationship between the British maker and Germany's Mercedes-AMG.

Going forward, Aston will use the Mercedes electronic "architecture," a definite step forward. It will also start sharing V-8s designed and built by the high-performance AMG brand. But in the DB11, the engine is

gloriously all Aston, a silky smooth twin-turbo 5.2-liter powertrain that explains why everyone, at some point in life, should own a V-12. It responds readily to the foot, so intuitively that you might think it is wired directly to your brain. Flatten the foot to the floorboards and you'll hit 60 in less than four seconds. The 2017 Aston Martin DB11 tops out at just slightly faster than 200 mph, but don't be surprised if you look for opportunities to drift off onto winding back roads, at the very least, to hear the guttural roar of that engine under wide-open acceleration.

You'll be in for another thrill as you dive into the first corner. We wondered what to expect when advised that this would be the first Aston Martin to trade classic hydraulic power steering for more energy-efficient electric assist. In many cars, that's a recipe for numbness. Not with the DB11. All the right road sensations passed through to our palms and fingertips, and the car responded with aplomb as we swerved and maneuvered up towards Mount Palomar and then back down again, occasionally having to make a quick adjustment to avoid gravel and dirt that had washed off the hills during a week of heavy storms.

With a car like this, dodging and darting, feeling the surge of power at our command, it's easy to imagine leading the double life of a Double-0 agent. The new Aston Martin DB11 is a car that anyone can bond with.

Visit [astonmartin.com](http://astonmartin.com)

—Paul A. Eisenstein



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[lagaleracigars.com](http://lagaleracigars.com)





## Renogy Phoenix Generator

I'm in a park a quarter mile from the nearest power outlet working from a laptop with two percent remaining on the battery, and I'm not the least bit concerned. I plug my power cable into an outlet in my briefcase, and, eureka, I have enough juice to charge my laptop five times over. And when that's tapped, I can get more power without moving.

The Renogy Phoenix Generator isn't just a 13-pound battery pack disguised as a briefcase. It's a mobile solar power station. Unhitch two latches and the briefcase opens like a clamshell to reveal two panels capable of siphoning 20 watts of solar power into a 16-amp hour (about 250-watt) lithium-ion battery.

Before I started using the Phoenix, I couldn't have told you the first thing about watts or amp hours. Now that I've used it some, let me state the obvious: the Phoenix isn't going to power your home. Heck, it probably won't power your hair dryer. But it provides more than enough juice to charge all of your gizmos through the unit's AC outlet, 12v lighter outlet and four USB ports.

Imagine you're at the beach, and, like me, can't refrain from checking your email. With the Phoenix, you can text and email with abandon while your kids try to drown each other. The unit is even water resistant, should you catch a splash. Or perhaps you're camping for some reason, and, naturally, ill-suited for any permutation of wilderness. You can plug

in a portable radio and drown out the impending dangers with the reedy voice of Ira Glass. If you find yourself in the dark, the unit even includes a surprisingly bright flashlight.

The Phoenix requires a full day of direct sunlight to completely charge, though I got mine to 35 percent in a few hours by a window. (The unit includes a handy LCD panel that indicates remaining power and output usage.) Furthermore, because it supports external solar panels, you can go full survivalist and create your own mini solar array. (Renogy even sells a compatible 100-watt foldable solar suitcase for \$255.) If you max out solar capacity, you can charge the Phoenix in just a couple of hours of daylight. Procrastinators, don't fret. You can always charge on before reaching your destination by either plugging the unit into a traditional power outlet or your car's cigar lighter, both of which will cut the charge time in half.

At \$700, the Phoenix isn't inexpensive, especially when compared with other battery packs. But the Phoenix is much more than a battery pack. It's a solar power generator, which, unlike a gasoline generator, will never run out of fuel, so long as the sun rises. It's simple to use, compact, and it won't leave your clothes smelling like petrol.

Visit [renogy.com](http://renogy.com)

—William Fenton





## Hamilton Princess & Beach Club

“Bermuda skipped a generation, so we need to reintroduce it to a whole new group of people,” says Allan Federer, general manager of the newly renovated and renamed Hamilton Princess & Beach Club (formerly the Fairmont Hamilton Princess). Following its “Mad Men”-era heyday, which peaked in the 1980s, Bermuda’s allure lagged despite its pristine pink-sand beaches, scenic golf courses and British charm and sophistication. But the island, which is only a short flight from East Coast hubs, is looking to reclaim its place on top destination lists, and the updated “Pink Princess” is poised to cater to the next generation of travelers with contemporary design and hotspot culinary venues.

The island’s Green family who purchased it in 2012, have invested \$100 million in upgrading the historic grande dame on the harbor in the capital city. Originally built in 1885, the property, with 400 rooms (from \$399) including 45 suites and 13 junior suites, has been launched into the 21st century with fresh, modern interiors. Museum-worthy contemporary artworks by Andy Warhol, Damien Hirst, Banksy, Takashi Murakami and Philippe Decrauzat hang throughout the public spaces and restaurants.

The new full-service marina is a social hub for guests as well as locals, who gather for cocktails at the al fresco 1609 Bar & Restaurant. The marina is also a popular spot for Marina Nights with music, tapas, cigars and whiskey flights. “Cigars are big in Bermuda,” says Federer, who notes that the Greens are cigar lovers. “Our guests like that they can come here and get Cubans and other great cigars.”

Celebrity chef Marcus Samuelsson was tapped for the hotel’s premier

dining venue, Marcus’, which is modeled on his popular Harlem restaurant Red Rooster. Capitalizing on a network of local producers—including organic farmers and fishermen who deliver fresh-caught wahoo, bonito, snapper, amberjack and octopus right to the marina dock—the culinary concept fuses Caribbean, Portuguese and Asian influences. Highlights include fish chowder croquettes with black rum aioli; shrimp and pork belly hot rice with jerk glazed pork belly, shrimp fried rice, kimchi and grilled pineapple; duo of crudo with local fish tartar, radish, jalapeño, crispy rice, apple wasabi, and beet cured salmon; and Aleppo-honey-glazed salmon with shiitake mushrooms, kale and roasted turnips.

Samuelsson also designed the menu at the hotel’s private beach club on Sinky Bay, a cove on the island’s south shore. The Princess Beach Club helps broaden the hotel’s business image by catering to guests who want to lounge on pink sands, swim and snorkel in crystalline turquoise waters.

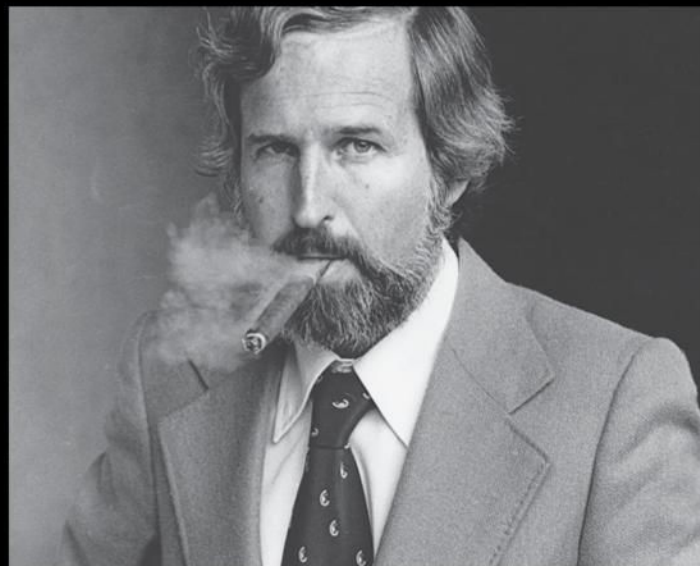
Those waters and the natural reef that surrounds the island are a major draw for divers, who can explore hundreds of shipwrecks. Meanwhile, golfers can choose from seven courses on the island, which boasts the highest concentration of golf courses per square mile in the world.

The Hamilton Princess’ rejuvenation is perfectly timed for a Bermudian renaissance, which is expected to get a considerable boost as the island hosts the 35th Louis Vuitton America’s Cup this summer.

Visit [thehamiltonprincess.com](http://thehamiltonprincess.com)

—Laurie Kahle





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## P3 Sunglasses

The perfect pair of sunglasses can pull your entire getup together, and this season the style to wear is a classic design called the P3. Although the name sounds state-of-the-art, the shades are nearly as retro as they come—based on military-issue eyeglasses from the 1930s, but modernized with a few interesting twists.

“The hottest look is what’s called a P3 shape, sort of a drooping circle that many consider the most classic frame style in eyewear. It has also been called the Preppy in the past,” says James Spina, editor in chief of *20/20*, a trade magazine for the optical industry.

Originally manufactured in wire frame, the military specs were designed to fit comfortably under gas masks. But much as with combat boots, peacoats and leather bomber jackets, the public caught on to the style and wore them even when out of uniform. When the eyeglasses were later crafted with thicker frames, the P3 took on a scholarly, owlsh look (Reference Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*).

The P3 derives its name from the optician’s term, pantoscopic, which refers to the tilt of the lens, with the numeral three referencing the difference in millimeters between the horizontal and vertical lens measurements. The measurements are what give the P3 lenses their unique, round shape. Most P3s feature a keyhole-style nose bridge and the frames are typically made from zyl acetate or metal. A popular trend among P3 sunglasses these days is to include a secondary bridge over the two lenses, reminiscent of another type of eyewear with a military origin—aviator sunglasses.

“The new sun[glass] versions are mainly plastic (we call it zyl) but there are metal versions as well and nearly all of them play with a sort of double-bridge design element borrowed from the aviator,” Spina says.

This summer, check out Ermenegildo Zegna for a classic P3 with its Champagne Chevron Sunglasses (second from top, \$350). John Varvatos delivers an interesting take on the P3 called Sullivan (bottom, \$318) that eschews the traditional nose bridge for an aviator-inspired secondary bridge. Ray Ban showcases two varieties of P3 sunglasses: RB 4266 (top, \$215), with brown gradient lenses; and RB 4256 Gatsby I (second from bottom, \$175), in tortoise shell with green mirrored lenses. Both pairs feature metal double-bridges. Lastly, Tom Ford offers a powerful-looking P3 called Clint (third from top, \$395), in black acetate with green lenses.

Visit [johnvarvatos.com](http://johnvarvatos.com), [ray-ban.com](http://ray-ban.com), [tomford.com](http://tomford.com) and [zegna.us](http://zegna.us)

—David Clough





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## Automotive Design Watches

Because gearheads intuitively grasp that a mechanical watch movement is essentially a fine-tuned miniature engine, scores of watch brands have tapped the marketing potential of partnering with automobile marques to design watches that allude to a car's signature motifs. But a few have revved up the relationship with genuine collaborations between designers and engineers from both disciplines.

Porsche Design, founded in 1972 by Ferdinand Alexander Porsche, has the most authentic connection between the two. Heeding Porsche's mantra of form strictly following function, designers and engineers from Porsche Design Timepieces in Switzerland, Studio F. A. Porsche in Austria and Porsche Development Centre in Germany came up with the new Monobloc Actuator collection (left, \$6,350 to \$6,850).

To create a purer chronograph design, they eliminated the push buttons and seamlessly integrated a pressure-operated rocker switch on the side of the case to activate the chronograph, powered by an automatic Calibre ETA Valjoux 7754. The engine of the new Porsche 911 RSR racecar inspired engineers, who referenced the camshaft and valve tappets. Porsche's team devised an articulated case that remains hermetically sealed when you move the rocker arm, even underwater.

Like all Porsche Design watches, the 45.5 mm Monobloc Actuator GMT-Chronotimer is constructed from lightweight titanium, which is available in natural silver or blackened finishes with your choice of a titanium bracelet or rubber strap and two dial colors—blue or matte black.

Bovet partners with the famed Italian automotive studio Pininfarina,

responsible for such classic designs as Ferrari and Maserati. Their latest collaboration is Tourbillon Ottanta Sei (center, \$173,300 in titanium; \$189,000 in rose gold). The watchword of this Ottanta project was "light," leading designers to construct a see-through case from four panes of clear sapphire crystal, etched with the Pininfarina logo and showcasing the movement from all sides. The 44-mm weighs just 15.54 grams in titanium. Three circles highlight the movement's single barrel: a 10-day power reserve display at 10 o'clock, the hours and minutes display at 2 o'clock, and an airy flying tourbillon at 6 o'clock.

This year, Baume & Mercier built on its partnership with the Carroll Shelby Company with the Clifton Club Shelby Cobra Limited Edition collection. A 1,964-piece chronograph pays tribute to the first official race of the legendary Daytona CSX2299 Coupe. A 196-piece CSX2299 fly-back chronograph marks the car's 196-mph speed record at Le Mans in 1964. A driver and designer of racecars, Peter Brock worked closely with Alexandre Peraldi, Baume & Mercier's design director.

The CSX2299 (right, \$7,960) borrows numerous elements from the sleek car. The striking bi-color blue and silver dial evokes the Daytona's tail. Chronograph pushers echo the car's foot pedals. The red chronograph hand is tipped with Brock's rising Cobra logo. The winding rotor recalls mag wheels. "Function first, aesthetics second," says Brock. "Make the shape work. Then make it look beautiful. Light and fast."

Visit [baume-et-mercier.com](http://baume-et-mercier.com), [bovet.com](http://bovet.com) and [porsche-design.com](http://porsche-design.com)

—Laurie Kahle





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## Custom Baseball Gloves

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But the way to speed up personalization is to buy custom. Scott Carpenter, of Carpenter Trade LLC, located near the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, makes custom gloves—based on six hand measurements—for people the world over. Models include fielding gloves and catcher's mitts (\$499), extra-wide knuckleball-catching mitts (\$549) and ambidextrous gloves (symmetrical with six fingers, \$599).

Starting with custom sneakers in 1999, Carpenter decided to apply his skills to baseball and moved to Cooperstown to study gloves. "There's no better resource to study the evolution of gloves than the Hall of Fame." He says no steadfast rules define the best glove. "It ultimately comes down to personal preference for many players. In my opinion, you want the lightest—and widest—glove possible that is still strong enough to do the job. A lot of defense comes down to how fast your glove is. When you get a bad hop or

a line drive and you have to make a split-second reaction to it, the only feature of the glove that is going to locate the pocket of the glove in front of the ball in time, is going to be lighter and faster versus heavier and slower." For that reason, his gloves are made of microfibers, which weigh on average 5 to 8 ounces less than the usual steer hide models.

Carpenter says the word "custom" is sometimes loosely used to describe mass-market gloves personalized for baseball stars. "Major leaguers do get small bits that are customized," Carpenter says. "They may get their name on the glove. Other touches might include the color of a web." So red, blue, green, gray—and multiple shades of brown—are now commonplace. "Otherwise it's the standard model made with dies, identical to those you buy in the store."

By contrast, Carpenter takes glove orders through the Internet. "People measure their hands at home and enter that data through one of our order forms," he says. "I start with that information to make a custom glove." And even though he pays no endorsement fees for players to wear his gloves, some 30 professional players wear the Carpenter model.

Visit [carpentertrade.com](http://carpentertrade.com)

—Kenneth Shouler





## Summer Bourbon Cocktails

When May rolls around it is hard to ignore the quintessential event drink: the Mint Julep. Tankers' loads are poured at the Kentucky Derby each year because they celebrate the springing of mint and the state's native spirit: Bourbon. (To consider substituting another whiskey in this drink has been likened to putting scorpions in a baby's bed.) Southern plaintiffs to the contrary, even Yankees can make it: muddle six mint leaves with bitters and simple syrup in a glass or metal cup, fill with Bourbon over crushed ice and garnish with more mint. But while the Julep is a great refresher, warm weather enjoyment of Bourbon doesn't end there.

You may remember the Whiskey Sour as the drink the forever over-heated (in more ways than one) protagonist of *The Seven Year Itch* claims as a breakfast beverage. Perhaps if you're making it from frozen concentrate with crushed ice, but if you prefer to fully appreciate this tangy quencher all day long, mix it with fresh ingredients: an ounce of lemon juice, an ounce of simple syrup, two ounces Bourbon and an egg white shaken vigorously over ice to a froth and strained into a cocktail glass with cherry and lemon garnish. If you really want to trick it out, make your own simple syrup, heating equal parts water and sugar and muddling in fresh basil leaves as it melts together.

Among the windfalls of the recent Negroni renaissance has been the attendant rediscovery of its whiskey-based cousin, the Boulevardier. When made with Bourbon in place of rye, it has all the same bitter, bracing qualities as the gin-based Negroni, but lots more grit and some welcome sweetness. Make it on the rocks and it will stay cool longer. Mix equal parts Bourbon, Campari and vermouth over ice in an Old-Fashioned glass, stir and garnish with orange peel.

A new-fangled way to make an Old-Fashioned during barbecue season is to add some smoke to the mix. Start by fashioning an Old-Fashioned: muddle a teaspoon of simple syrup, two dashes bitters and an orange wedge in an Old-Fashioned glass, add two ounces Bourbon, stir and add large ice cubes. The smoke can get into the glass in several ways. One is to rest the ice in a smoking barbecue for a minute. Another is to char a wood plank with a blowtorch and cap the resulting smolder with another Old-Fashioned glass. Then simply pour the contents of the first glass into the second. The last method is to blow cigar smoke into a bell jar and then place the container over your drink for a minute or two. We think you'll agree that one's the most fun.

—Jack Bettridge



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## Indoor Skydiving

If you've always wanted to skydive but can't get past the part where you're clinging to the threshold of the plane with your instructor shouting, "What are you waiting for?" there's a simple, safe and relatively terror-free alternative. It's indoor skydiving with iFly, a company with dozens of vertical wind tunnels in the U.S. and abroad (two of them on cruise ships). The experience involves floating on a fan-generated column of air, or rather hurricane force winds.

People who have tried both say it's a reasonable facsimile of free fall, the most important difference is that you don't have to worry about your parachute—or manhood—failing you. I first flew with iFly, because who hasn't dreamt of being Superman? I went back to see whether I could relax enough to enjoy the scenery, limited though it is in a wind tunnel.

First-timers watch a brief training video to learn hand signs—fan noise makes voice communication nearly impossible—and then don a jump suit and helmet. You're accompanied at all times by an instructor who makes sure you keep your chin up—and not just metaphorically. The breeze is so strong that even minor adjustments to arms, legs and chin can send you off course.

My first instructor took me on a high-speed ride to the top of the tunnel and back again—three times. I had no regrets when my second

teacher, Nico Gonzalez, didn't interrupt my peaceful sightseeing tour.

The average flight takes a couple of minutes and is the equivalent of 1.5 skydives. An entire course of instruction helps you progress to doing back flips. However, getting as good as Gonzalez—being able to soar and scamper around the tunnel walls like Spider-Man—requires dozens of hours of training and experience.

Children as young as three have suited up. And iFly is understandably popular for kids birthday parties (as the average 10-year-old suffers from fewer pangs of mortality than a middle-aged person) and a lot more memorable than a pony ride. It's also in demand for corporate team building exercises.

At the location I visited in Westchester, New York, a two-flight package (including a personalized flight certificate) costs \$89.95 (prices vary by location). But you'll probably want to spend a little more to bring home photographs and videos of yourself floating on a column of air in your flight suit, your cheeks puckered by the wind. You can post them to Facebook and prove to your friends you're not half the wimp they think you are. That souvenir alone seems worth the effort.

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—Ralph Gardner Jr.



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# The Odd Couple

by  
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Fine

portraits  
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Actor Chris Pratt and  
director James Gunn of  
*Guardians of the Galaxy*  
forged a bond of  
friendship over cigars

STYLING BY ANNIE PSALTIRAS  
GROOMING FOR CHRIS PRATT BY BRIDGET BRAGER  
GROOMING FOR JAMES GUNN BY LOUISE MOON





Chris Pratt starring in, clockwise from above: *Jurassic World*; the 2016 remake of *The Magnificent Seven* and *Passengers*, with costar Jennifer Lawrence.



T

HE QUESTION WAS ABOUT GOALS: At this stage in his young and highly successful movie career, what is there that Chris Pratt still wants desperately to do?

The answers, which came as he smoked cigars on a Hollywood Hills patio, were part personal, part professional, and then, well, weird.

"I want to do a comedy," says Pratt, speaking during a 72-hour furlough in Los Angeles from filming in London. "I want to flex my muscles as a collaborator, so that I have more creative control."

The 37-year old actor, who mixes Midwestern good looks with the physique of a tight end, takes a puff of his cigar, a Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2. "I want to catch a world-record large-mouth bass—a 25-pounder. I'd love it if my son became a professional bass fisherman and I was his sponsor and we could go fishing together everyday. That would be awesome." Then Pratt turns on the comedic charm that has made him a star. "Oh, and I'd like to fight an animal in self-defense."

This answer catches the attention of his smoking companion James Gunn, the writer and director of *Guardians of the Galaxy*, which earned more than \$770 million worldwide and made Pratt an A-lister. The sequel reaches theaters May 5, and it's expected to be one of the biggest

moneymakers of the year. "I think an ostrich-human battle might be good," jokes Gunn. "And a badger would make a good match."

"A badger could definitely kill you," Pratt observes.

Gunn drops his voice to a comic sotto voce: "You can't just go waltzing into the ring against a badger. You've got to do your research."

Then the pair, who have turned an underdog entry in the Marvel Universe into an unexpectedly successful comic book movie franchise, burst out laughing. Which is business as usual for when the two get together, whether over cigars or while on the set of a movie. Despite the fact that Gunn initially resisted the idea of casting Pratt in the original *Guardians of the Galaxy*, which came out in 2014, the pair have become fast friends and enthusiastic collaborators.

"I remember that he saw a lot of people—and he wasn't interested in seeing Chris, who he thought of as just the funny guy on 'Parks and Recreation,'" says Sean Gunn, James' brother and lifelong collaborator. "But when he heard Chris read, he knew within seconds that this was the guy....A lot of the comedy in these movies comes from James and Chris just trying to crack each other up. The cast in general has a nice, familial feel, but James and Chris set the tone. And they're both very funny."

LEFT: CHUCK ZLOTNICK / © UNIVERSAL PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION; TOP RIGHT: SCOTT CARFIELD / © COLUMBIA PICTURES / EVERETT COLLECTION; LOWER RIGHT: PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY; PREVIOUS SPREAD: SUITS BY ISAIA / SHIRTS, TIES AND POCKET SQUARES BY BROOKS BROTHERS / WATCH BY PANERAI



## Chris Pratt by the Numbers

Chris Pratt has starred in some of Hollywood's biggest movie money-makers over the past three years. Here are his biggest hits, by worldwide box office.

**Jurassic World** (2015)  
\$1.67 billion

**Guardians of the Galaxy** (2014)  
\$773 million

**The Lego Movie** (2014)  
\$469 million

**Passengers** (2016)  
\$299 million

**The Magnificent Seven** (2016)  
\$162 million

SOURCE: BOX OFFICE MOJO



Pratt leading the *Guardians of the Galaxy*, including Zoe Saldana (far left) and Dave Bautista (far right).

Gunn still cannot quite believe his luck, as he and Pratt relax and smoke on a patio that offers a panoramic view of downtown Los Angeles and everything west to the Pacific Ocean. Gunn is puffing one of his favorites, a Trinidad Topes Edición Limitada 2016.

Gunn is 46, an emphatic sort with spiky reddish-brown hair and horn-rimmed glasses to match. “You’re the greatest actor collaboration I’ve ever had,” he says to Pratt. “You come in with ideas that I’m able to reshape. Then you take it and we toss it back and forth and work on it. Now, for this second film, I knew your voice—all your voices—and could hear them as I wrote the script.”

Pratt offers Gunn praise of his own: “When you’ve got someone writing for your voice, it’s like trying on clothes that were tailored for you.”

Millions await the release of any film about Spider-Man, Captain America or the Avengers. But the Guardians of the Galaxy comic books were a fringe hit of the Marvel Universe, a cult favorite at best, and the movie had zero buzz. Beyond the Marvel label, there was little that would call attention to the first film: a minor comic book franchise, a little-known director with two (little-seen) films to his credit, and a leading man who was a featured player (and not the star) on a network sitcom. Sure, the cast list featured the names of Bradley Cooper and Vin Diesel—but they wouldn’t actually be seen in the movie. Instead, they voiced digitally animated characters: a talking raccoon named Rocket (Cooper) and a sentient tree named Groot whose vocabulary was limited to the words “I am Groot” (Diesel). With a release date in August, often a summer dumping ground, it was anything but an obvious blockbuster.

Instead, the dark horse exploded out of the gate into the summer of 2014, taking in more than \$330 million in the United States (making it the third biggest movie of the year) and \$770 million in worldwide grosses. The film turned Gunn into a filmmaking force and made Pratt a known commodity. Coming a few months after the \$469 million take for *The Lego Movie* (for which Pratt voiced the lead character), *Guardians* completely transformed Pratt’s status. The following year he starred in the *Jurassic Park* reboot *Jurassic World*, and it reaped \$1.67 billion worldwide—No. 4 all time. Pratt was now a seismic box-office force, which carried over to his 2016 roles in *The Magnificent Seven* and *Passengers*.

By the time he reunited with Gunn and castmates Cooper, Diesel, Zoe Saldana and Dave Bautista to make *Guardians Vol. 2*, Pratt had become a full-fledged movie star.

“There was this moment when I was at a party and Barbra Streisand and Jim Carrey both came up to me to tell me they loved what I’d done,” says Pratt. “Streisand asked me, ‘How does it feel? You’re this year’s big thing.’ Jim Carrey told me the same thing. That was when those people stopped being my icons and became my peers.”

“As we’ve gotten more money and more success, he’s become this movie star simultaneously,” Gunn says. “But he also made huge strides as an actor. Hopefully, he’ll get more attention for that because he may be a star, but he’s also an actor. There was a huge shift from the first film to the second, in terms of his knowledge of the craft. He was more confident and thoughtful.”

Pratt wasn’t seeking stardom so much as a steady paycheck as an actor





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when he arrived in California. A native of Virginia, Minnesota, who grew up in Washington State, he was a 20-year-old college drop-out, working in a restaurant in Hawaii. One day he waited on actress Rae Dawn Chong, who was directing a low-budget horror film. She cast him and brought him to Los Angeles and, within a couple of years, he had a featured role on the long-running TV series “Everwood,” transitioning from that to a recurring part for a season of “The O.C.”

“To me, success meant not having to have another job besides acting,” Pratt says. “It meant having enough money to pay the bills and feed yourself and survive, really. A roof over your head, food on the table, gas in the car and the ability to create opportunities: If I was just a working actor without having to wait tables, I considered myself living the dream.”

He was getting small movie roles and, on one, *Take Me Home Tonight*, he met his future wife, actress Anna Faris. After they married, he worked steadily, though he was still relatively unknown, while Faris’ career took off. Before he landed the role in “Parks and Recreation,” Pratt had worked himself up to a level where he was being considered for starring roles—as Jake Sully in *Avatar* and as the new James T. Kirk in the *Star Trek* reboot—but those roles went to other actors.

Nick Offerman, who costarred with Pratt in “Parks and Recreation,” remembers meeting Pratt at a party a couple of years before the series.

“I knew his wife, who had a reputation for being smart and funny, and I was talking to her, when this Adonis sat down next to her,” Offerman recalls. “And I thought, ‘Of course, this lovely young woman has got some big meathead for a boyfriend.’ But Chris almost immediately established himself as hilarious, smart and a real sweetheart. These are not qualities you often see in people as physically attractive as Chris.”

Pratt has a blend of boyish good looks and athleticism, quick wit, smart-aleck charm and small-town humility. His sunny good humor is reminiscent of the young Kevin Costner or Jeff Bridges; at other times, he brings to mind Harrison Ford. Pratt has been mentioned often (and, so far, without basis) as a contender to play younger versions of two of Ford’s most iconic characters—Han Solo (a role that actually went to actor Alden Ehrenreich) and Indiana Jones.

His costars certainly admire him. “On a movie set, the star sets an atmosphere and I’ve never seen Chris in a bad mood,” says Dave Bautista,

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**“I was at a party and Barbra Streisand and Jim Carrey both came up to me to tell me they loved what I’d done.” —Chris Pratt**

---

the professional wrestler who plays Drax the Destroyer in the *Guardian* films. “He’s aware of that; he knows there are going to be some long, uncomfortable days. That turned us into a family.”

Pratt is a genuinely funny actor, after seven seasons playing the not-quite-bright Andy Dwyer weekly on “Parks and Recreation,” a show loaded with comedic talent, including Amy Poehler, Rob Lowe, Aziz Ansari and Offerman. The character wasn’t even supposed to survive the first season, but Pratt was so winning in the role that his character wound up as a regular for the show’s seven seasons.



Nick Offerman (left), who spent seven seasons with Pratt on “Parks and Recreation,” calls Pratt “hilarious, smart and a real sweetheart.”

“Watching him refine his comic skills in the middle of that A-team of comedy talent was a true joy,” Offerman says.

Back in those days, Pratt’s weight tended to yo-yo. He’d let himself go for “Parks and Recreation,” then shed weight and get in shape for movie roles, like *Moneyball*. When he had to sweat off pounds and bulk up to play a member of Seal Team 6 in *Zero Dark Thirty* he decided to keep

the weight off for good.

“I’ve learned not to overestimate how deep the audience is—that, as an actor, a big part of it is looking as good as you can,” Pratt says.

“There was a point in his early 30s where he looked more husky,” Offerman notes. “But then he got into amazing shape. At one point, I looked at him and said, ‘You ought to be playing a superhero.’ I have a pretty open man-crush on him.”

Along with the look of a hero, Pratt also brings real emotional depth to his roles. While *Guardians’* Peter Quill is quick with a quip, Pratt can tap into obviously deep feelings in a moment of silence. Gunn is convinced that Pratt’s access to those emotions and the *Guardian* films’ willingness to reach for them is one the movies’ greatest strengths.

“I want it to be deeper and more emotional,” Gunn says. “We want to give people what they liked about the first one—and something more. The second film has to fulfill the promise of the first. You have to continue to give people the unexpected, to take them to new worlds they haven’t imagined.”



Adds Pratt, “It’s that sweet spot where you give people what they want but not what they’re expecting. Comedy, emotion and action form this triangle. And it’s about bringing it to an even better level.”

The original *Guardians* introduced audiences to Pratt’s Peter Quill, a rakish half-Earthling space-scavenger who has christened himself Star-Lord. Quill was kidnapped and raised by a group of intergalactic pirates shortly after his mother’s death when he was 12, and the first film’s plot centered on Quill’s search for something called an Infinity Stone, a source of cosmic power. By the end of the film, Star-Lord had banded with a group of his former competitors, aliens all, to save the universe from being destroyed.

*Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* will pick up a few months later and will include Peter’s search for his long-lost father. It will also delve into the backgrounds of the other members of the still-nascent *Guardians of the Galaxy*—Cooper’s Rocket Raccoon, Diesel’s Groot, Bautista as the blue-

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**“Comedy, emotion and action form this triangle. And it’s about bringing it to an even better level.” —Chris Pratt**

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skinned Drax and Zoe Saldana as green-skinned Gamora—in their quest to protect the universe. And that’s as much as Gunn, Pratt or Marvel will say.

There is one fact they’ve let out: Peter does find his father, and he’s named Ego the Living Planet, a talking planet whose human form will be embodied by Kurt Russell. That casting choice was suggested to Gunn by Pratt, a long-time admirer of Russell’s.

“I didn’t know anything about it, really, so when I started talking to them, I had to see the first movie—and I really liked it,” says Russell, who appeared on the cover of *CIGAR AFICIONADO* in 2006. “It was an exciting opportunity to play a character I’d never done before—or will probably play again.”

Pratt’s Quill character reminds Russell of one of his own roles, as trucker Jack Burton, battling kung-fu ghosts in *Big Trouble in Little China*, John Carpenter’s mid-1980s action-comedy. “Jack was a guy who thought he was on top of things when he wasn’t really on top of things,” Russell says. “I could feel some of those same things that James was drawing from for Chris.”

Russell and Pratt connected over a shared love of the outdoors, including hunting and fishing. Russell chuckles at reports in the press that Pratt wants Russell to adopt him: “We had a good rapport—I could easily see Chris folding into our clan,” Russell says. “I definitely could have had a boy like that.”

Friends and collaborators today, Pratt and Gunn barely knew each other when they started the first film. They bonded over cigars during filming the original *Guardians* movie in London, getting together at least weekly to enjoy a cigar together.

“I found a shop in London, run by Ajay Patel, where I would go every Thursday night and smoke,” Gunn says, talking about the Casa del Habano in Teddington, United Kingdom. “I met Ajay about 15 years ago; he’s sort of the Cigar Whisperer. He can meet you for two seconds and tell

you what cigar would be best for you. I felt like I’d reached some new cigar-smoker’s nirvana. When you’re making a movie, you’re surrounded by film-industry people. This was a time where we could sit and smoke that would get us out of talking about the industry.”

Gunn introduced Pratt to Patel: “I hung with Ajay and found these breakfast cigars, La Flor de Cano, that I just loved,” Pratt says. “I started smoking them on the set.”

Pratt laughs and gets a mischievous gleam: “The Brits are so polite. There I am, smoking these little cigars on the set and it is, in fact, illegal. But they were so reluctant to finally say, ‘I’m very sorry, but I’m afraid it’s against the law.’ And I said, ‘No, no, that’s cool—just tell me when the cops come.’ Hey, I show up on time, I know my stuff. It’s like, my one diva thing.”

Gunn chuckles: “I’ve worked with diva actors. He’s no diva.”

Their evenings together in London helped Pratt hone his taste for cigars, Cuban and non-Cuban. Pratt still enjoys the Flor de Canos, as well as Rocky Patel Vintage 1990. Pratt has a humidor at his Hollywood Hills home, and at a place he has in Washington State.

“I like a cigar I can smoke in the middle of the day,” says Pratt, who is a former cigarette smoker. “I’m a little quantity over quality, I’m afraid. But I like that smoking a cigar takes so long. You light it and it’s a social thing. We’re smoking cigars, let’s sit and talk. In a way, it’s like fishing.”

Still, Pratt is conscious of not smoking around his young son, Jack, 4: “My rule is I don’t let my son smell it on me,” he says. “So I only smoke when I’m on the set or after he goes to bed.”

Gunn, a true aficionado, has a standing humidor at his office and a walk-in humidor at home: “His humidor is so huge and great,” Pratt says admiringly.

“My go-to cigar over the years has been a Partagás D4—or a Lusitania, depending on how much time I have,” Gunn says. “Aside from Ajay, I’m a bit of an autodidact about cigars. I started out with full-bodied cigars and very quickly that became all I smoked. But over time I found an appreciation for a blend of medium and lighter cigars.

“I smoke a cigar almost every night. I kick back and relax; I think that’s a healthy thing. I have an active brain and this is a high-stress occupation. So I’m allowed to smoke a cigar, relax and do nothing for a little while each day. I have a smoking room at home with proper ventilation. I rarely smoke the same cigar two nights in a row. I try to strike a balance between Cubans and non-Cubans.

“I don’t drink. I don’t do drugs,” says Gunn. “I hang out with the guys and smoke cigars.”

Gunn, 46, has been making movies since he was a 12-year-old in his native St. Louis, says brother Sean, who plays one of the galactic pirates in the *Guardians* films and stands in for the digital character, Rocket Raccoon, during filming. “He made his first one in Super-8. I was always in them, usually killing someone—or getting killed.”

After getting an MFA in writing at Columbia, Gunn went to work for schlock-horror purveyor Troma Films, creator of the *Toxic Avenger* films: “I was paid \$150 to write a script and I got to make a movie. I learned every single practical thing there is to know about making a movie, including choreographing sex scenes. It gave me much more pragmatic approach than going to film school.”

Says Sean Gunn, “My brother always had a great imagination for building worlds and a storyteller’s eye. Everything in his life and career led him to direct *Guardians*. He’s perfectly suited to that story and those







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characters. That's one of the reasons I was less nervous that the movie would be a success."

"For me, the important thing is the conversation with the culture," James Gunn says. "It doesn't need to be permanent. Everything we do is sand castles. So what can I create in the here-and-now that's interesting, that will affect people's lives in a positive way? Hopefully, people walk out of *Guardians of the Galaxy* loving someone a little more; I want to make the world a better place for an hour or two."

But making a better world comes with a price. Pratt, open and funny in conversation, with manners that would make a mother proud, has had to ratchet down his natural accessibility, because his visibility as a mass-market movie star makes it almost impossible to go out in public otherwise.

"It's tough sometimes, the amount of management you need to do on things you used to do spontaneously," Pratt says. "I miss that but, in a healthy way, I'm able to unpack it. What I really miss is sitting down and talking to strangers who don't know me, so we can discover each other. I'd say the majority of the people I meet have an idea about me before they meet me. There's something nice to being able to surprise somebody."

Gunn puts in, "I miss being able to go out to dinner with you. Do you remember that dinner in Atlanta [where they shot *Vol. 2*] where a woman came and sat down at our table? Neither of us knew her and we were having a conversation, but she just started having a conversation with you."

Pratt nods, noting, "Obviously, it's not as bad as having to worry about paying the bills. I've always been a pretty deferential, go-with-the-flow guy. But now I have to be economical with my time. If I go out and want to do normal things, I have to be comfortable disappointing people. So I just don't take pictures with people. Because that's not about enjoying the moment; it's about stealing the moment to brag about later. So I say, 'Would you settle for a handshake?' And then they take the picture anyway."

Gunn is convinced that the new *Guardians* will be a turning point for Pratt: "He's very vulnerable in this film. The more vulnerable and real that Chris Pratt is in the film, the better it will be."

Pratt sees himself at a cusp. Having reached a commercial pinnacle, he understands that the next phase of his career offers more and better choices. It's also given him the financial freedom to take time off, instead of worrying about whether the next job might be the last, the actor's perpetual fear. He makes a point of using that freedom to focus on family and to give something back.

"I'm determined to take three or four months off each year so I can be home and just be present," he says. "The money thing gets rid of a lot of anxiety that's a lot of stress for a lot of people. But fans, success,



accolades—what's really fulfilling is if I go to a Ronald McDonald House and spend some time there. I can give a kid 15 minutes when he's not thinking about the fact that he's terminally ill, or take a sibling aside and spend a few minutes with them and give them a bit of a distraction from what's going on in their family. Those are hard things to deal with. I walk out after that and I feel great. To me, that's what feels good about the fame and success. The rest of it feels just north of exciting." ❖

Contributing editor Marshall Fine is critic-in-residence at The Picture House Regional Film Center in Pelham, N.Y.





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# ASHARK WITH

BY KENNETH A. SHOULER  
PORTRAITS BY DAVID YELLEN

Daymond John, a star panelist from TV's "Shark Tank," fashioned a garment business from his interest in music

# Style

**D**aymond John is sitting, pitched forward at the waist. His face rounded by that boyish smile he flashes on the television show "Shark Tank," he listens keenly. The tilted, eager posture suggests that what lies ahead of him is the only direction he considers worthwhile. He sports his signature diamond earrings, blinking above a gray, pin-striped wool suit, accented with French cuffs and massive gold cufflinks. "It's a Brioni tie," he volunteers, "with a little pop of orange." Indeed, the orange, set against the pinkish background of the tie, makes for his boldest fashion statement. "And I always wear some sort of boot, because I am a short guy."

His size is inversely proportionate to his achievements. His is a rags to riches tale—or a Queens to universe tale if you want the true scale of it—from selling hats from a garbage bag in New York to selling globally.

Looking back on how it all began, he recalls smoking a Romeo y Julieta, as he is now. "It was the first cigar I had that I really liked," he says. "So there is sentimental value there. We smoked them on a guys' night out. We were all just smoking and sitting around." He then recites a litany of anti-skills: "Can't dribble a basketball, can't sing, can't draw, didn't know anybody, didn't go to college—but that didn't stop me at all."

Nothing has. Aside from being a venture capitalist on the riveting, follow-the-dough reality show "Shark Tank," John, 48, was selected by former President Barack Obama as a Presidential Ambassador for Global Entrepreneurship. He is a three-time author and ubiquitous speaker, who espouses an unpretentious,

pragmatic, and sensible business philosophy. Lately he has launched blueprint + co., an open workspace for like-minded entrepreneurs. Investing in more than 60 companies, he gives new meaning to the word "busy."

Daymond Garfield John was born on February 23, 1969. His mother, Margot, and father, Garfield, who was born in Trinidad, were divorced after John's 10th birthday. An only child raised by his mother and grandmother in Hollis, Queens, he recalls his mom working multiple jobs—ranging from an executive assistant at Lehman Brothers to the luggage department at American Airlines—to make ends meet.

Daymond was fortunate to be in a co-op program at Bayside High School that allowed him to work full-time and attend school on an alternating weekly basis. "And you would get the same kind of credits for it," he recalls. "Now, knowing I was dyslexic, I know that the job was my workaround for not wanting to go to school. But it was also my fascination for making money and also my love for actually being able to go to New York City every single day of the work week. I was a foot messenger for First Boston, a private banking firm. I could support myself and I didn't have to be another burden to my mother. I always wanted to help my mother instead of being a burden to her."

Though he didn't know it then, the job lit an entrepreneurial fire beneath him. "It taught me discipline, it taught me about having a job. It also exposed me to Lehman Brothers at 53rd and Park Avenue. Every time we had a package delivery that was over 10 blocks long, you would get \$2, one for the train up and one for the train back. I would walk and save the fares. By the end of the





Daymond John in New York City,  
wearing the logo of his latest  
business venture, blueprint + co.



day I would have eight extra dollars. By Friday I would go upstairs to the dining room at Lehman and treat myself to one of those steak lunches for \$15. I was just 17. I was hearing these guys complaining that they couldn't buy the new Ferrari that was coming out, or that they were going through a divorce and it cost millions of dollars. They were private bankers, and they were stressed and always intense and so miserable."

Hip-hop music was emerging at the time, and it was a seedbed for creativity. "Russell [Simmons] discovered all of them," John says. "Salt-N-Pepa, Run DMC, LL Cool J, and then the rest came from my neighborhood: Ja Rule, 50 Cent, there's a bunch of them because of Russell. They started to influence everything—the way you walked, talked." John took notice, and saw opportunity. "I saw a De La Soul video and they were wearing a cap that looked like a ski cap. But instead of a ball on the top, it had a string an inch down from the top and it's tied and hangs there."

John believed he could make a better hat. So it was off to Jamaica, Queens, to buy fabric. "Because there is a heavy Caribbean influence in my neighborhood, and a lot of Caribbeans are tailors, they sewed and mended their own clothes. I bought a bolt of fabric, a big roll; it looked like a big old candy cane." It cost \$40. His mother taught him to sew, and he made 80 hats. "I folded them and put them all in a garbage bag. And I stood on the corner and pulled one out, two, four at a time. And people are walking by. I sold them at the Colosseum Mall at 165th Street in Jamaica, Queens." He saw a competitor on a different corner selling for \$22, so John sold his for \$10. "I had to undercut him to get rid of these hats."

As his peers found their voice in musical cadence and rhymes, John's creativity filtered out through fashion. "It actually hit me; it wasn't a conscious stream of thought. I always loved fashion, and I always loved music. I never thought you could make money doing something you loved. Many of us were taught that we had to grow up and go to work in a factory until 60 years old and retire. And coming from a middle-class

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**"Many of us were taught that we had to grow up and go to work in a factory. I never thought you could make money doing something you loved."**

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place like Hollis, Queens you either worked at Aqueduct Race Track, or Belmont, or LaGuardia Airport or Kennedy. But when I saw a couple of designers in urban clothing, I realized that we had the power and we could make our own clothes, we didn't have to be dictated to by someone in Italy. You always hear that someone else is so much greater. That's when I realized that this can be our culture making for us. We don't have to let these Italian designers tell us, "Hey guys, wear this on the street." And that was the genesis of For Us, By Us (FUBU). People have often mistaken it for a color. But it was actually about a culture that anybody of any color would love hip-hop."

Now he turned to creating and marketing different products. "I was 21 or 22. I started bringing on friends. We were doing it because we loved what we were doing. We were going to expos, flea markets. And why? Because we were selling it and we were feeling pretty good about what we were doing. And girls were out there, too, and we were talking, hanging

out. I thought maybe we can make hats, sweatshirts. With sweatshirts you have screen printed and you have embroidered. So you had about six types of items in the line.

"FUBU came about right after I sold about 800 hats. I paid some money to a friend who drew up a logo for me, and that was what separated my hats from other people's hats." John had made his first foray into branding. "I went to all the video sets I could, and I would put it on a rapper if they allowed me to. All of a sudden people recognized the name, FUBU. To make ends meet, I was working as a waiter at Red Lobster, and working on FUBU as I found time. [In 1992] we decided to go to a trade show in Las Vegas. And we wrote \$330,000 of orders." The order eventually secured a contract with Macy's in New York. Daymond soon sewed his logo onto hockey jerseys, sweatshirts and T-shirts. Then, in 1993, LL Cool J, a neighborhood friend of Daymond's, agreed to wear one of Daymond's shirts in a picture that became the centerpiece of his promotional campaign. Then, during a 30-second commercial spot for The Gap, LL Cool J wore a FUBU hat in the commercial and incorporated the line "for us, by us" in his rapping.

John was in direct competition with Donna Karan and Tommy Hilfiger. "It was amazing—when you are on the floor and Macy's puts you on the floor that is right next to these companies." It is hard not to be big-headed. "But being big-headed hurt us. The way that it hurt us was that we were so hot, that when you sell to the large stores, you sell them what is called a prepack, with 12 pairs of jeans: two size 32s, two 34s, two 36s, all the way to 42s. We'd say, 'you can't break it up, take it the way it is.' Why? Because we were too lazy to go and say, 'I'm sorry, how many of each do you want?' We were doing prepack and the store would want to break it up and we would say, 'No, take it, take it.' So what happened is that we made them take it so much like that, so what happens? You're a store. You just bought \$100,000 worth of jeans. 32 through 36 sold out, but 38 to 42 didn't. So now in every box you have extra jeans at 38 and 42, and so what do you do? Instead of the jeans being \$60, you've got to discount them at \$30 to get rid of them. It starts to corrode the line, because now the kid who comes in to buy the jean at \$32 or \$35 says, 'why are those over there worth \$60?' And that was us being [inflexible]."

Despite such early setbacks, some would come to refer to John as "a branding genius." John laughs at the label. "I don't know what it means to be a branding genius, because I am not," he says. "That may be another way that people want to describe me for sizzle. If I was a branding genius, FUBU would be Apple. My understanding of branding is a 'mark' that is identified with a story or a promise of something or of ownership. People confuse branding and marketing. They are two separate things. Branding is the mark on something."

John can, at times, seem unimpressed, even self-effacing, in describing his own abilities. But it seems rare that others underestimate him. Now, with an Alec Bradley Prensado sending off smoke from his left hand—an "amazing" cigar, he says of the Honduran—he recalls the genesis of his participation in "Shark Tank." John relates how in 2009 producer Mark Burnett was launching the new reality-based television show as a franchise of the Japanese show "Dragon's Den," which had premiered eight years before. John was skeptical of its chances. "There was a Skype-type of interview. The producers were telling me how great the show was and all the people they were going to have on it. I laughed at them. I told them they were full of crap, and that 'You guys around



[illegible]

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The sharks, from left, Barbara Corcoran, John, Mark Cuban, Kevin O'Leary, Robert Herjavec and Lori Greiner.

## John wasn't sold on "Shark Tank" when he was first approached by the show's producers. "No one wants to see this crap," he said. The show became a hit.

Hollywood are just crazy and that no one wants to see this crap.' They told me Mark Cuban was going to be on the show, and I told them they were full of it. I didn't know Mark then, but I said, 'The crazy guy who throws chairs on the court—the billionaire who's on TV more than he needs to be? Why the hell would he ever do your stupid show?' I guess that really turned them on. I guess they said 'I really like this guy, he doesn't give a shit.'"

The rest is history. Last year the ABC show had more than 7 million viewers, and it's now in its eighth season. The success owes to a real-time, horse-trading feel as entrepreneurs compete for investments bestowed by venture capitalists. John often sees something in the contestants that goes beyond what can be tabulated on a spreadsheet.

In one dramatic episode, a woman from Oregon named Kristina Guerrero was pitching Turbopup bars for dogs. She sought \$100,000 for 20 percent of her company—a \$500,000 valuation—for a company that made what was essentially a pocket-sized 250-calorie bar equivalent to a whole meal. The Sharks dove in. "What makes this different than the other 5,000 dog treats on the market?" said Kevin O'Leary, known for his nasty streak. "That's exactly what makes it different; it's not a dog treat," she replied. Now peeved, O'Leary sassed her: "What is it, a sandwich?" Unfazed, she held to her script: "It's a complete meal—250 calories." Mark Cuban inquired about the price. She distributed the bars, so the Sharks could feed her dog. Cuban stayed with the numbers: "What are the sales?" In 2015 she had \$7,000 in sales. No sooner did her cause appear lost than Lori Greiner set up a tee shot by asking about her background.

Kristina was a medaled pilot, having flown three deployments with C-130s, one for Operation Iraqi Freedom. While she was making the bars in her kitchen, Turbopup became the official dog food for the National Association of Search and Rescue. She also outran the competition by getting her bars in ski and bike shops. The sharks now praised her for her service, but one by one they bowed out, Robert Herjavec applauding her sideways strategy, but saying her sales needed to go from \$7,000 to \$100,000 before he would wet his beak.

Only one remained: John. But he was on the fence, because of her ungrounded valuation of \$100,000 for 20 percent of her company. "The problem is you're asking so much, I would have to take so much."

"What would you ask as far as your equity?" she asked.

"The gamble I will take with you is because of your tours and everything else—you must be disciplined; you obviously don't sleep, just like me. So here's my offer: I will go \$100,000 for 40 percent." O'Leary needled John. "The company isn't worth \$500,000," he said. John countered: "The company is scaling fairly quickly with no help."

Kristina asked John if he would take 30 percent. "It's not worth it for me," John said, softly and regrettably. "That's why they call it the Shark Tank," snapped Herjavec. "That's why you didn't have enough meat on the bone to prove its value," O'Leary added, twisting the knife. "Kristina, he's offering you \$100,000 at 40 percent," said Herjavec. "Do you really want to counter at 30?" She heeded the advice, saying "35? Is that fair?" A dramatic pause ensued before John said "35—you got it." As Kristina left, O'Leary, AKA "Mr. Wonderful," couldn't resist one last dig, turning



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in John's direction and saying, "That was a mercy financing." John replied, "I think she's got it all together to this point, and a woman who did three tours for our country is not gonna go to sleep." Herjavec agreed: "There is no doubt she is the real deal."

"It's always the person," John says, reflecting on that investment. "I saw that she had fought for our country. She flew bombers operating multimillion-dollar equipment, so she can handle selling dog bars."

"And then she had this energy that lit up the room. You want to call an entrepreneur who, even when it's a bad day, will say, 'Hey, it's just one of those tough days, I always expected it.' You want to have a conversation. You don't want to go, 'Damn, I don't want to call that person. Because that person is going to be depressing.' Right? Anyone can lift you on a great day. Kristina does that on bad days. She hasn't let me down; she's doing over a million dollars in business."

He also likes entrepreneurial ventures with causes attached. He invested \$500,000 for a 17.5 percent share of Elephant Pants, where 10 percent of every purchase of the pants is donated to saving elephants from poachers.

Now, as a Presidential Ambassador for Global Entrepreneurship, John says he gets to use "my passion to share entrepreneurship with as many people as I can to hopefully empower them. My manager Eric Ortner connected me with [Obama's] Secretary of Commerce, Penny Princeton. We saw eye to eye and she thought it would be an honor for me to represent the White House. The plan was for me to talk about entrepreneurship domestically and internationally. So I accompanied the president and the White House staff to Kenya, Cuba, San Francisco. The idea was to share entrepreneurship. There were three pillars to it: one, to educate people on entrepreneurship; two, to educate them on how to get access to capital; three, to educate them on how to scale the businesses. We've seen that the No.1 reason for domestic violence has been the lack of capital in a home. And the reason that President Obama wanted to do this is when people don't have resources to feed their families or take care of themselves or feed themselves, then they are susceptible to people who have alternative motives. But if somebody in Kenya realizes that it takes a dollar to heat their home in a week, and they can open up their cell phone and make \$5 a week on their phone, then they are less likely to pick up a weapon or less likely to do something else not in their best interest."

With a hand in about 60 small businesses, John seems every ready for a new deal. And, he often observes, some of the best ones didn't grab much of his attention when FUBU was absorbing his time. Bubba Q's Boneless Ribs is one example. Now he's into blueprint + co. "We are in a shared economy, as we know. Whether you are sharing a car called Uber, whether you shared a house, people do now share open office space like this, usually start-ups share those things." Located on 38th Street in Manhattan's garment district, blueprint already hosts representatives such as Leesa, a direct-to-consumer mattress company; a woman's plus-sized clothing company, Ashley Stewart; and a private jet ride-sharing company, JetSmarter. People who share this space also end up sharing ideas.

Daymond John is always open to the new experience, the next idea, the new venture, the next smoke. Now he is multitasking, talking alternately about his favorite cigars and cigar rituals. "I like to smoke with people who are real cigar smokers, because they tell me what cigars are the best or what I would like," he says, now taking a draw on an Aging Room 356ii. He also enjoys Padrón Anniversaries.

"I mostly like to smoke after an event is done and when I can



decompress with people I know to discuss what we are going to do in the future for some of our businesses," he says. In his new book, *The Power of Broke*, John argues for the counterintuitive idea that you don't need start-up money or contacts to make a buck. Rather, starting from nothing—with only desperation, hope and hunger coursing through your veins—forces you to think more creatively and marshal your resources more efficiently. There is some support for this notion, since in 2014, 275 of the wealthiest Americans on the *Forbes* 400 list were self-made entrepreneurs, which means they started out with nothing and made use of the "power of broke."

What will be the fourth book? It's unknown for the time being. Right now, John would rather think about the next great smoke. "I still want to smoke a real Cuban Cohiba," he says. "To me, it has always been an iconic cigar so I am going to have to make that happen."

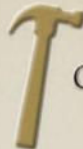
It should be easy, considering everything else that's happened. ♦

*Kenneth Shouler is a frequent contributor to CIGAR AFICIONADO, and an associate professor of philosophy at the County College of Morris in Randolph, New Jersey.*







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The distinctive and explosive swing of Justin Thomas, which lifts his shoes nearly off the ground.





# Swinging Out of His Shoes

With a swing belying  
his size, Justin Thomas  
rockets up the PGA Tour  
*By Jeff Williams*

MIKE EHLMANN/GETTY IMAGES



Justin Thomas dropped to the practice green at Riviera Country Club, rolling around in hysterics, flabbergasted that Jordan Spieth's caddie Michael Greller had missed a putt (and missed it badly) during a drill. It was the eve of the Genesis Open, and in a sport where silence and seriousness often reign, the 24-year-old from Kentucky was acting his age, his smile extending from his face to the sparkle in his eyes. He was acting out the sheer joy of how far he had risen in the game of golf.

And why not? As the newest generation of players ascends to the summit of golf's mountain, led by Rory McIlroy and Spieth, Thomas has joined the climbing party in an impressive manner and has fulfilled the imperative of his golf DNA. With a powerful swing that literally takes his shoes off the ground, sending the ball to extreme distances and making him one of the top 10 drivers on the PGA Tour, he's done what he's expected himself to do—be a PGA Tour winner, throw himself into the conversation about major championships, vault into the top 10 of the world rankings.

His start to the wraparound 2016-17 PGA Tour season was sensational, first winning the CIMB Classic in October in Malaysia where he defended his first ever Tour title. In January he took Hawaii by storm, winning the SBS Tournament of Champions and following it up with a victory at the Sony Open on Oahu that was punctuated by becoming the youngest player in PGA Tour history to shoot a 59. He also posted the lowest 72-hole score in PGA history.

So here is Thomas getting himself ready for one of the Tour's most prestigious tournaments, soaking in the L.A. sunshine and having a right old cracker of a time with one of his best buddies. Riviera will see a lot of Thomas over the years, and had seen him as a college player in the past. "I love this place, I really do," says Thomas.

He came to this famous track full of confidence and, more importantly, full of great expectations. Yes, the three Tour wins to start the season are great, going into the record books with a 59 is great, being a top-10 player is great, but there is so much more. "It's definitely the best of my career," Thomas says of his recent play. "I definitely haven't shown the world my best golf. I haven't even shown the world great golf, or consistent great golf."

He says these words matter of factly, sitting in the player lounge at Riviera. All the great players have played and won here, and Thomas expects to count himself among them one day. His words come out of his round, bright face not so much as self criticism, but self belief. He's confident going on cocky but all athletes need a substantial ego to succeed.

The confidence, and the seeds of his talent, are in his blood. His father Mike, who is also his coach, is a PGA of America master professional at the Harmony Landing Country Club in Goshen, Kentucky. His grandfather Paul was head professional at the Zanesville Country Club in Ohio, and played in the 1962 U.S. Open at Oakmont.

Justin had a club in his hand by the age of two—his father cut down a persimmon 2-wood—and he has whaled away at the ball with a vengeance

ever since. By the family calculation he has won at least 125 tournaments starting in his junior years, flowing through a successful college career at the University of Alabama where he won the national title, turning pro and stepping up to the Web.com Tour where his success gained him entry to the PGA Tour.

There were also many national and international appearances on the Walker Cup team, the Palmer Cup team, the World Amateur team, the Junior Ryder Cup team. In 2009 at the age of 16 he got a sponsor's exemption into the PGA Tour's Wyndham Championship and shot a 65 in the first round, going on to make the cut.

There is a display of his accomplishments in the pro shop at Harmony Landing which includes a ball from each of his tournament victories. All the memorabilia goes to underscore the golf DNA that courses through the family.

Standing on the Riviera putting green as his son takes a few strokes, Mike Thomas can't explain why his son got the deep end of the gene

pool, he's just darn proud that he does. "If you knew what the difference [between his son and him] was, you could clone it for sure," says Mike, a soft-spoken, modest man with a regal bearing. "He's always been very driven, he's blessed with talent, blessed with more talent than my father and I."

Thomas has recorded several 400-yard drives on the Tour, hit a measured 3-wood in Hawaii at 357. He was ranked in the top 10 on Tour in driving distance through the first third of the season, averaging around 308 yards. All this accomplishment springs from a mighty-mite body of five-feet, 10 inches in height, and maybe 150 pounds.

Rory McIlroy, a bomber himself, isn't much bigger than Thomas, but through strenuous workouts he's become a hunk. Thomas? He's a muffin. He's trim and toned and works out, more for injury prevention than to develop a set of guns. He's not physically impressive, isn't the athletic monster of a Dustin Johnson or a Jason Day, or even as big as his buddy Spieth. Rickie Fowler is ripped by comparison.

Not looking like the Hulk doesn't matter on the teebox. When Thomas takes a swing with his driver, it's "Kaboom."

Even he doesn't fully understand where his length comes from. "It doesn't make a lot of sense, looking at my stature and my frame," says the young golfer, stealing a glance at his biceps, which don't exactly ripple. "A lot of it is technique, of how I deliver the club to the ball and using the ground force, as it's called. I'm basically in the air when I hit it, up on my toes and hitting it solid is the most important thing. I feel like the greatest thing about the driver for me is that I can hit a lot of shots. I feel like if I have to hit the fairway I can hit it low and fly it 270-280 and if it's firm it will roll out to 320. If I have bunker at 310 and it's a little downwind, I can put it up in my stance and carry it."

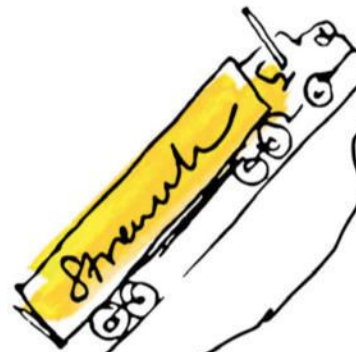
His dad watched his son explode into the ball from the very beginning and realized that was what Justin needed to do. "I was very short and he was very short until like his senior year in high school," says Mike. "Because he



Thomas holding the CIMB Classic trophy in Malaysia in October. He won the same tournament in 2015.



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**“Because he was so small he swung really hard at it. We have videos of him coming off the ground. His feet coming off the ground swinging as hard as he could when he was 8, 9 years old.” —Mike Thomas**



Thomas teeing off at the Sony Open in Honolulu, Hawaii, in January. He won by seven strokes, shot a 59 in the opening round and set a record for lowest 72-hole score in PGA history. The week before, he won the SBS Tournament of Champions by three strokes, giving him a blazing-hot start to 2017.

was so small he swung really hard at it. We have videos of him coming off the ground. His feet coming off the ground swinging as hard as he could when he was 8, 9 years old.”

While he’s glad to have the length, and length is an extremely important component of the modern game, it’s the development of the short game that has accelerated Thomas’ rise to the top. “If it’s driving it another 15 yards or making one more 30-foot putt every round, I’ll take the putt,” says Thomas. “Hey, that’s four shots better over the course of a tournament. That goes a long way up the leaderboard.”

The short game takes patience, in practice and practicality. The game itself takes patience on the day-to-day level. Patience and youth aren’t necessarily a harmonious blend, especially when Thomas saw Spieth win the Masters and U.S. Open and rocket to the top. Spieth, among others, has been an inspiration of sorts to Thomas, his success making him feel as if he had underachieved.

“I think it drove me a lot,” Thomas says. “It’s weird, I mean, I wasn’t mad, but it was maybe a little frustrating sometimes seeing some friends and peers my age do well. Not because I wasn’t cheering for them, because I feel like I was as good as them. It’s just immature of me. I mean, the fact of the matter is, over the course of a long career, we’re going to beat each other. That’s just how it is.”

So he struggles with patience while embracing its necessity. “I think I’ve gotten better at it every year. My rookie year I struggled with it a

little bit. Last year at points I would struggle with it,” he says. “I think at this game, it doesn’t matter who you are or how long you’ve been out, you have to be very patient and there are going to be times where you struggle with it. It’s about managing it and still figuring out a way to get it done. And that’s why I’ve done so well out there this year. You just have to realize there are days when things aren’t going to go your way, you are not going to be playing well and you just have to enjoy the grind of shooting the best number you can when you aren’t playing well.”

Part of that goes to a conversation he had with golf legend Jack Nicklaus, who had reached out to him and told him that if he ever wanted to talk about the game, his door was open, literally. Nicklaus invited Thomas to his home in Palm Beach, Florida, and the two talked for nearly three hours.

One Nicklaus remark stood out. “I had the same game plan during a tournament when I was playing bad as when I was playing good: being just as aggressive, hitting at every pin,” says Thomas. In response, Nicklaus said, “When you’re hitting it bad, you can’t do that. When I’m playing bad, I need to just hit the green. I remember that talk a lot.”

While there have been plenty of talks over the years, his father has always stressed that Justin needed to know his own game, and be able to fix or alter it as he went along. “I’d watch him hit a few balls and ask him what he thought was causing the ball to do what it did,” says Mike. “I’d tell him, ‘What are you going to do, call me when you’re on the 15th hole of a tournament?’ Because of that, he knows his own game.



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"I teach all my kids, when they first come to the club, your goal is not to need me. You can come out and show me how great you are hitting it or ask any questions. I always taught Justin that way. You have to know your own game and how to make a fix on the fly. The part you can't figure out how or why he could fix himself and create shots long before we talked about the fault or the fix. He figured a lot of that out on his own."

So much of success on the Tour comes from the short game—getting the ball into the hole. Putting, chipping and pitching isn't as adrenalin inducing as bombing the driver 350 or sticking a 5-iron 220. But when it comes down to the show and the dough, the short game is the payoff, and Thomas knew he had to get better.

"I had to work a lot on my short game. That was the biggest difference between college to Web.com to PGA Tour," says Thomas. "Chipping and putting, patience and acceptance is the biggest thing. It's not one tournament, it's a long year, it's the money list, it's the Fedex Cup points list. If you miss a cut or finish 40th or 50th, you just have to take the positives from the week and build on the negatives, which is what I've done a pretty good job of."

He certainly did a record-book job of it when he shot the 59 at the Waialae CC in Honolulu. And he did it with an early bogey. The score was 11 under par on a par 70 course.

"I fully had faith in myself that I could shoot a really low number, shoot in the 50s," says Thomas. "It's nice to have that in my record that I have actually done it. I hope to have plenty more chances in my career. You obviously don't know if that's going to happen or not, but I have always felt like I have been a person that can get pretty hot, and when I get it going, I can shoot some low scores. I guess it just kind of validated that a little bit."

The round and the victory validated a lot about his talent and fortitude, something that Spieth knew well. They had been bumping up against each other in junior and college events, had been teammates on international teams for more than a decade. At the Tournament of Champions at Kapalua, Spieth finished third and was there to congratulate Thomas on his win when he came off the 18th hole.

"Yeah, I think it's potentially floodgates opening for him," said Spieth at the time. "The guy hits it forever. He's got a really, really nifty short game. He manages the course well. He used to hit more drivers, and he's dialing back a bit now and hitting like a trusty 2-iron out there that he can still hit 285 yards, you know, with a little bit of roll. So, really excited for him. It's awesome. It's awesome to see. He's going to be tough to beat next week, too."

And he was, especially when he started with a 59. Daniel Berger, another longtime rival and friend, played with him the first two rounds. "That week at the Sony Open, I've never seen a guy play like that," says Berger. "Like, he didn't even know what he was doing. He would just hit the ball and it would be 10 feet and would make the putt." By the way, Berger shot 65-67 in those first two rounds and was nine shots behind Thomas.

After his Hawaiian wins, Thomas headed to Augusta National for a casual round with his dad. Masters invitees get to play the course in advance of tournament week. Thomas played in the Masters for the first time in 2016 and now because of his additional Tour wins and high world ranking, Thomas was at Augusta this year with high hopes for his first major victory. But even in the casual round with his dad, he was nervous on the first tee. "Yeah, I think of anywhere to be nervous, it's Augusta National," says



Thomas is the youngest golfer to ever card a 59 in a PGA event. In the first round of the Sony Open in January, he opened and closed with eagles. He also had eight birdies.

Thomas. "But I also think it's perfect for more. I can take advantage of my length there and if I get my putter going, I can score there."

While it is sometimes difficult to come down off a golf high, Thomas knows that he needs to get away from the game, get the thoughts of drives and putts and strategies on the back burner. He shares a house in Jupiter, Florida with former Alabama teammates Bud Cauley and Tom Lovelady, both trying to achieve what Thomas has on the PGA and Web.com tours.

So what does Thomas love to do when he's off from golf? "Absolutely nothing," he says. "I can sit on a couch an entire day, watch movies, watch TV, hang by the pool. We will go out in the boat sometimes, do some fishing."

He remains a huge fan of Alabama football and all the other sports at the SEC powerhouse. His favorite athletes are Kobe Bryant and Sidney Crosby. He's a fan of the Boston Red Sox, Cincinnati Bengals, Pittsburgh Penguins and Golden State Warriors. He's played with Warrior superstar Steph Curry and teammate Andre Iguodala and is impressed with their golf games.

After achieving great success in AJGA tournaments in Kentucky, Thomas returns there to work with the Boys and Girls Club of Kentucky and to host the Justin Thomas Junior Championship.

"These young players have it all," says Ernie Els, who was joined by Thomas at the annual CIGAR AFICIONADO/Wine Spectator Els for Autism Pro-Am in March (see page 20 for details.)

"They are talented, smart, good people," Els says. "They know how to give back. Justin is playing in my event and I really appreciate how this young man gives back. With players like Justin and Jordan, and there are a lot of others, too, the game is in good hands."

Thomas noted at the Honda Classic about how much confidence he sees in the walk of Dustin Johnson and Rory McIlroy, who have both held the crown of No. 1 player in the world, and how they exude confidence and a winning attitude. With his multiple Tour wins and a 59 in his pocket, Justin Thomas can walk the walk, talk the talk and plant a flagstick on the summit of the game. ♦

Jeff Williams is a contributing editor of CIGAR AFICIONADO.



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# robotic poker

In the heyday of online Texas Hold'em, one man assembled a team of pros so successful they were flagged as robots

**I**N THE DRIVEWAY OF A HILLTOP HOME in Brentwood, California, the Tesla is charged and loaded. A bottle of 12-year-old Hibiki Whisky resides in the trunk alongside a six-pack of good Bordeaux. Arturo Fuente Hemingway Short Story cigars top the console. Big band and classic rock have been programmed on the sound system. Professional gambler turned hedge-fund whiz Rob Reitzen is driving. I'm riding shotgun. His company's CEO Larissa Posner has the backseat all to herself.

The plan sounds simple: Road trip to Vegas, eat and drink well, make a little money at blackjack, revive PokerGirl. The latter is the real order of business, but it's also the diciest part of the trip. Beating blackjack and dining out are easy. "Ramping up PokerGirl," Reitzen says, "may present a problem."

PokerGirl is a relic from the glory days of online Texas Hold'em. It is the name under which a protégé of Reitzen's won hundreds of thousands of dollars by playing the game like a computer. She was in her early 20s, had previously been a waitress at Arnie Morton's steakhouse in Los Angeles, went by the name Lary Kennedy in real life and learned to crush online poker games the Reitzen way. Then she was accused by Full Tilt Poker of actually being a computer. Her account was frozen, \$80,000 was seized by the website and TMZ actually did a story on the imbroglio. Lawsuits ensued and things got ugly amid accusations that she played under multiple identities.



**BY MICHAEL KAPLAN**  
**ILLUSTRATION BY RIKI BLANCO**

She filed a lawsuit against Full Tilt in 2009, claiming, among other things, fraud, libel and unjust enrichment. At the time, it seemed that Full Tilt could deem any player a "bot" and withhold winnings at will. The case was eventually dismissed and she never refiled.

This was before Black Friday in 2011, the outlawing of on-line poker in much of the United States and Full Tilt's ultimate insolvency.

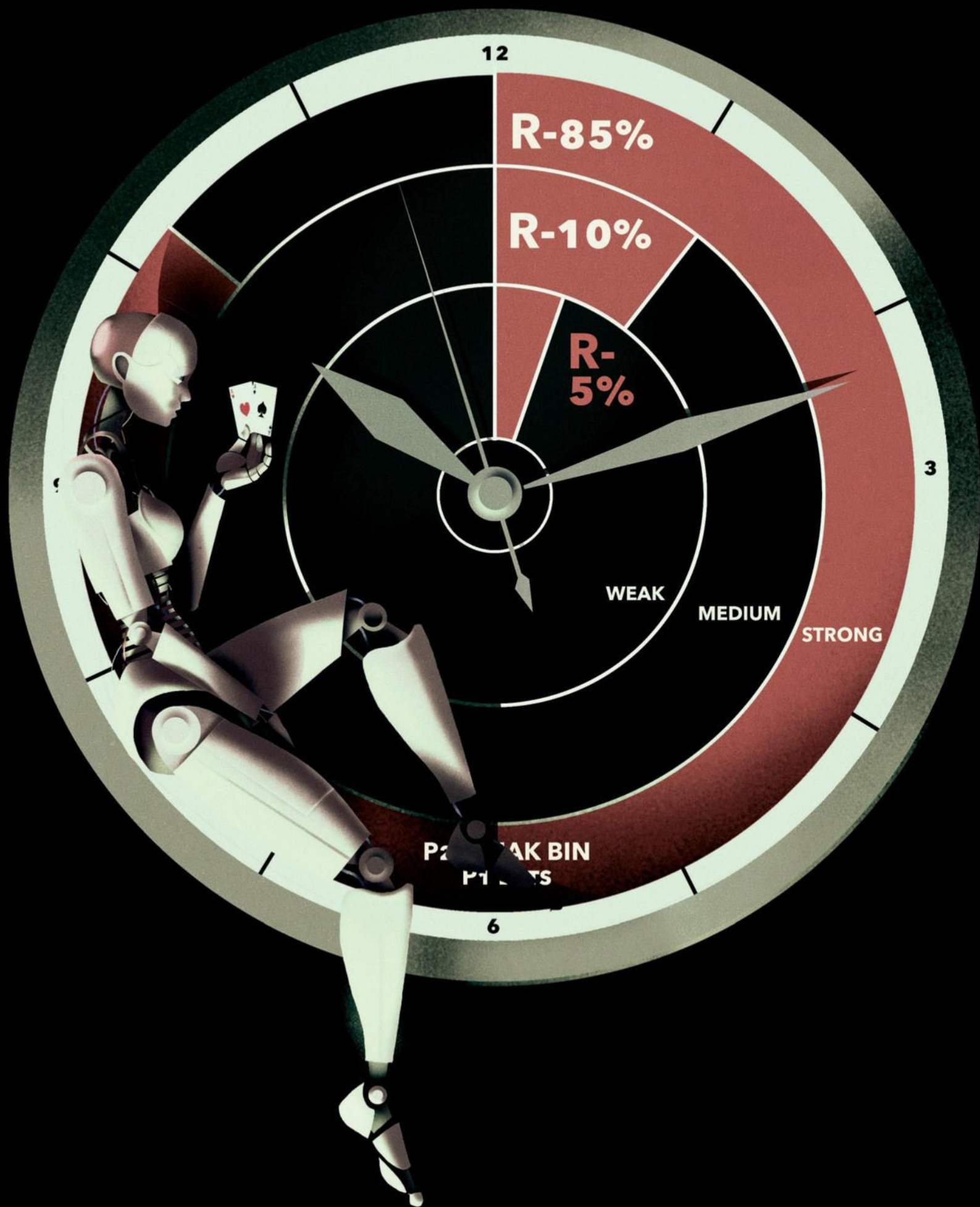
But it's nine years since PokerGirl bet her last street and the online landscape has changed dramatically. Reitzen isn't even sure if we will find a suitable game to play on the screen of my MacBook Pro. "There's a chance that we'll be stuck buying in for dinky stakes," he says. "We won't have a decent sample size [because we're not in town for very long] and we may not win."

Is he concerned that her long, profitable approach to poker won't work under today's conditions? "No," he says. "That'll be fine. The math remains the same. And it's perfectly sound."

But, as we prepare to pull out, Reitzen is not focused on any of that. He's leaving behind three computer engineers who'll spend the weekend programming strategies for his fund, Time Series Solutions. They'll work on ways of beating Wall Street by finding quantifiable patterns in the markets and capitalizing on them. He gives his guys hugs and marching orders. Then we pile into a car that practically drives itself.

As he hits Interstate Highway 15 and noses his automobile toward the Mojave Desert and Las Vegas, Reitzen explains that he spent a couple of lackluster years as a math and probabilities major at UCLA. Along the way, he found *The Cincinnati Kid* to







be inspiring and nurtured a natural fondness for poker. So much so that, in 1979, he asked a girlfriend's Hold'em-playing roommate to loan him a book that would help improve his game. The notions of training neophyte players and leveraging the game into a high-volume business were the furthest things from his mind. Reitzen just wanted to play smarter at the L.A.-area poker clubs.

Due to a mix-up, though, he received a volume called *Playing Blackjack as a Business* by Lawrence Revere. "I thought it was interesting and learned to card count," says Reitzen. "I started making trips to Vegas, improved my skills and built my bankroll. Eventually I joined a team."

During those nascent years of the home computer, a teammate of Reitzen's got his hands on one of these seemingly miraculous machines. That man would go on to create the brilliant computer system that yielded hundreds of millions of dollars for a group of horse bettors in Hong Kong. But back in the early '80s, he and Reitzen were happy to create plays that paid off with far less remuneration in blackjack. They refined strategies that decimated games in Las Vegas and beyond.

Reitzen and his partner invented custom counting systems, devised methods for cutting to certain cards that would be advantageous to players or disastrous for dealers, improved techniques for memorizing sequences that could be recognized in future shuffles. They racked up their share of million-dollar weekends and terrorized casinos around the world. It was a good time to be playing blackjack. Profits rolled in.

The promise on the back of Revere's book—that if the reader learns these strategies, he will be able to fly around the world for free, stay in fine hotels, eat gourmet meals and come home with a profit—was being realized by Reitzen. He remembers a particularly colorful few hours of playing in Amsterdam. "It was an underground gambling club in every sense of the word: situated behind a pharmacy and down a flight of steps, so the place was literally subterranean," he remembers. "There was craps and blackjack and a sign on the wall with various exchange rates. Then they had another room where people were fucking on stage."

Reitzen did his best to focus on the cards. He was there to play, and play he did, tidily winning some \$20,000 without breaking a sweat. Then he heard one partner say something to the other. "He spoke Italian and I asked the guy I was with—who was backing the play—what had been said," relates Reitzen. "I was told that he asked if I was card counting. Then I wanted to know how the other answered. My backer said that he replied, 'The American ain't counting shit.'"

Nevertheless, the next day, when the casino owners offered to send a limo for Reitzen, he refused. Much to the consternation of the backer, Reitzen did not play the underground den again. Soon after, though, he had more of a life-changing blackjack experience in the men's room of a small Nevada casino where he and another player, not known to him, were both counting the decks.

Stepping away from a urinal, Reitzen whispered, "The big C."

He saw it as a subtle way of signaling that he realized they were both counting cards.

Surprised, the player replied, "Oh, you're using one, too?"

Reitzen remembers being a little puzzled by the comment but he was shocked a second later: "The guy pulled down his pants, showing a jockstrap with batteries and wires running out of it. He was all wired up with a small computer inside the jockstrap. Wires ran down to his toes where

there were switches that allowed him to tap in the cards as they were dealt. Then he had sensors attached to his genitals; the sensors gave off pulses, signaling him on how much to bet and the plays to make. It was completely amazing! I told him I was just counting in my head and he nodded. He told me he wondered why I made a few mistakes."

The trip turned out to be a losing one for Reitzen, but he left with something more valuable than cash. "I headed home enthralled with the computer. Not long after, in like 1982, I got one for 10 grand, but we eventually had the sensors moved to just above our ankles."

Without knowing it, Reitzen had stepped into the golden age of what would become known as "computer play." Casinos had not yet thought to make the use of computers illegal and a former Raytheon engineer hated casinos enough to outfit players with machines that allowed for perfect counting and shuffle tracking. The builder was Keith Taft, a born-again Christian who found gambling joints to be evil. Reitzen is agnostic where religion is concerned, but, as far as computers went, he became an instant believer. In fact, it would be fair to say that he went computer crazy.

Reitzen and his forward-thinking partners recognized that computers could be used to leverage their advantageous gambling operation and turn



it into a real business. "We had a slot-machine team that played in a profitable way derived on the computer," he says. "People were wearing computers to beat blackjack and there was work being done on roulette. We were beating sports and the stock market. Then there was poker. . . We figured out that, pre-flop, people fold more often than they should," Reitzen recalls. "So we came up with optimal betting strategies for every street of Limit Hold'em. Another system helped us to beat lowball."

Technology made gambling into a profitable blast throughout the 1990s. Reitzen stocked up on collectible wristwatches, he joined the Beverly Hills Grand Havana Room and drove around in a Bentley. He and his group bankrolled blackjack games in California casinos—state law once mandated that third-parties serve as the house in casinos that have certain types of licenses—and that provided a giant windfall. At some point they had 300 people playing and scouting and beating games around the globe. "Everyday I'd get reports on how we were doing," he says. "And let's just say that we were doing pretty well."

Then online poker hit, PokerGirl served him a steak at Arnie Morton's and things really blew up.

**H**ours after arriving in Vegas, we're showered, changed and crowded around a table at the Sin City version of New York's Carbone restaurant. Eighties music plays from the speaker system, waiters in retro uniforms take orders, a rum cart makes the rounds and the place feels transported from the set of *Goodfellas*. At the table are Posner and Reitzen; Hein Hundal, an engineer who worked for Reitzen on the poker project; a mathematician who goes by the name Duke and another engineer known as The Kid. Guest of honor is Lisa Arnold, a diminutive Chinese woman with oval-framed eyeglasses, a baggy sweater and a scarf around her neck.





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She looks harmless now, but 10 years ago, you would not have wanted to confront her across an online heads-up poker table. She logged in under the name RedGard1 and ranked among the game's deadliest assassins, playing heads-up limit poker for stakes as high as \$100/\$200. When she first met Reitzen, she barely spoke English and knew nothing about the game. Between 2002 and 2010 (playing the last of those years in London after online poker was outlawed in the U.S.) she won nearly \$8 million.

A 1990s émigré from China, Arnold was originally put in touch with Reitzen via a mutual friend. Reitzen hired her to work on his slot-machine team, beating progressive slots by playing them just as they were mathematically poised to pay off. Eventually casinos got wise to the ploy and rousted her from the premises.

Arnold thought she was out of a job, but the opportunity was actually shifting into high gear. Since the earliest days of online poker, Reitzen and his team had been using hundreds of non-cheating, game-theory-programmed computers to beat humans on various sites. Site owners knew this wasn't good for business. They designed software for sniffing out the bots and, by 2002, began to shut down their accounts.

Undaunted, Reitzen decided to turn humans into computers. "That's



when Rob told me to learn poker," Arnold says, sipping wine and working through an enormous slab of veal parmigiana. "He gave me a machine to play against. It told me when I made mistakes and showed me the game. Then, when I got good, Rob tested me."

RedGard1 crushed poker. Sharp as she was at the game, however, Arnold could not have realized that the strategy she employed cost Reitzen millions of dollars to create. It was designed over the course of decades, with loads of engineers.

But the real ingenious part of the whole thing was how Reitzen made it easy for anyone to play like a computer. "I had 20 clock faces that were labeled for every possible Hold'em situation," he says. "The faces were made of cardboard and fit under the hands of standard-size clocks. All you had to do was find the clock that described your situation"—say, a big pair in the small blind—"and make whatever play the second hand told you to make. That moving hand provided randomization. You always made a correct decision and played with enough variation that opponents could not figure out what you were doing. We turned the seemingly intuitive game of poker to the totally rote game of blackjack."

Things were going fabulously well for Reitzen and for more than 100 players employed on his poker team. They worked from home, video-cameras monitored their play, Reitzen backed them and they kept percentages of their winnings. Then something unexpected happened: Full Tilt began accusing the players of being bots. Their accounts got shut down. "I reached out to a Full Tilt partner and tried proving to him that my players were human," says Reitzen. "I sent in the clock dials and explained how they played. I even offered to show videos. He didn't care. He said they played like computers, so they were computers."

Arnold had some \$80,000 confiscated from her account and Reitzen

had enough. Soon after all of this, he mothballed the poker enterprise and focused his attention on Wall Street. Arnold continues to find poker profitable, but now she antes up in Pacific Northwest casino poker rooms, near where she lives, and plays face to face with humans. Lawsuits designed for recouping money came to nought and the operation completely ceased. "I always had a soft spot for our poker team," Reitzen says, calling for a check and last pours of rum. "I do miss it a little."

An afternoon later, we convene in a room at the Cosmopolitan. Reitzen has brought his clocks. My laptop is open. Lisa Arnold is aboard for coaching. The idea is to log onto a legal online poker site in Nevada, register myself as PokerGirl, deposit money and rev up the old engine. The intention: profit at poker. However, there is a problem. Heads-up Limit Hold'em, which this system is specifically designed for, is a ghost town. There is no one to play against. We're sitting alone at a virtual table, feeling a little bummed.

Then we devise a workaround for playing on a site that might have the appropriate action.

"Because your bankroll is so small, we have to play cheap," Arnold says.

"No problem," I tell her. "This is not about making money, it's about winning something by playing the Reitzen way. It's proof of concept."

There are plenty of tables with stakes of 10-cents/25-cents. It'll be a gas just to deploy the strategy. My avatar settles down at a heads-up table and another player immediately joins us. I prepare to wipe him out. Then something strange happens. The player is remarkably good. He bluffs at all the mathematically correct times, he traps when he should and rarely folds. "He's playing close to game-theory optimal," Reitzen marvels.

Several hands in, my opponent leaves the table and is immediately replaced by another one who also never misses a beat. "They're world class," says Lisa. "They're too good to be playing at these low stakes."

"They're bots," Reitzen declares. "We're playing against computers. The site is infested with them."

We stick around for a while before agreeing that it's useless. The game has changed. Bots have taken over the tables that Reitzen's humans once dominated. There's a lot of chattering, reminiscing and passing of the Hibiki. Reitzen gets quiet and watches a bit of the higher stakes, no-limit ring games. "There are definitely no bots there," he says. "We made it halfway to finishing a no-limit program and never managed to get it done."

Soon my computer is shut down, the clocks are packed up and the air hangs heavy with resignation. But just for a while. By nightfall, all of those feelings are shaken off. We're in a private dining room at an off-strip casino with some high-roller friends and a couple of card-counters. We eat too much, drink too much, laugh too much, take advantage of casino largesse and make many toasts to PokerGirl and RedGard1.

Things proceed to get rowdier in another casino where we commandeer a blackjack table, count cards blatantly and puff away on cigars. Maybe it's thinking about old times, but Reitzen verbally replays a few hands from the no-limit games he saw online. He points out mistakes that had been made and wonders when the U.S. will legalize the Internet iteration of poker. "I think I'm going to finish working on no-limit poker," he says suddenly, putting up a purple chip for the next hand of blackjack. "I'm sensing an opportunity. I think we can make some real money again."

The sentiment warrants yet another toast. ♦

Michael Kaplan is a CIGAR AFICIONADO contributing editor.



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94

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110

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112

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121

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125

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# churchills

The Macanudo Inspirado Orange line was originally released for Europe in 2014, but happily, General Cigar decided to bring it to the United States last year. Scoring 93 points, the Churchill is the highest-scoring Macanudo of the last decade. Many offshoots of the core Macanudo line have come and gone throughout the years, some concepts working better than others, but none has been as successful as the Inspirado Orange Churchill. While the blend may have been formulated for European palates, the Churchill is both a technical and artistic masterpiece that will be a welcome addition to any humidor in any country, especially at its low suggested retail price.



## HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., HONDURAS,  
NICARAGUA  
BINDER: HONDURAS  
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

## MACANUDO INSPIRADO ORANGE CHURCHILL

The thick, buttery smoke of this sophisticated Churchill enriches its leather and mesquite qualities as well as the bright, resonant notes of almonds, citrus and black pepper. A complex and harmonious cigar.

U.S.: \$6.99 U.K.: N/A

93



## NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: MEXICO

## OLIVA SERIE V MELANIO MADURO CHURCHILL

This box-pressed Churchill delivers a pleasantly toasty, nutty smoke finessed by hints of espresso, cloves and a floral, honey finish.

U.S.: \$13.99 U.K.: N/A

92



## NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 3/4"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

## ILLUSIONE 888

A rich and earthy cigar whose chewy smoke is accentuated by notes of roasted arabica beans, baking spices and a savory, leathery finish.

U.S.: \$9.20 U.K.: N/A

91



## NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: COSTA RICA, NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

## NAT SHERMAN PANAMERICANA JULIETA

Zesty and sweet, this dark Churchill weaves earth and black pepper notes with cloves and cinnamon. A touch of cocoa comes through on the finish.

U.S.: \$12.00 U.K.: N/A

91



## NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

## LA ANTIGUEDAD SUPER TORO

Box-pressed with rounded edges, this large Churchill starts strong and spicy but mellows out to show light woodiness and a floral finish.

U.S.: \$8.90 U.K.: N/A

90



## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

## E.P. CARRILLO CORE PLUS CHURCHILL ESPECIAL NO. 7

Covered in a beautiful, medium claro wrapper. It's a woody, cedary smoke with hints of graham cracker and peanuts, but the finish is a bit chalky and dry.

U.S.: \$7.70 U.K.: N/A

89



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**LA FLOR DOMINICANA DOUBLE LIGERO  
OSCURO NATURAL ESPECIAL**

An inky oscuro topped with a large, knotted pigtail. It's earthy smoke is redolent of minerals, black licorice, and a boozy, vermouth finish.

U.S.: \$10.50 U.K.: N/A

**89****DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

**LA AURORA 100 AÑOS CHURCHILL**

Copious amounts of smoke come off the easy draw of this tawny-colored Churchill. It has an earthy, coffee-bean character that hints at caraway seeds and leather, but the finish is a bit chalky.

U.S.: \$14.00 U.K.: N/A

**88****DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**THE LAST TSAR CHURCHILL**

Woody and grassy with underlying nuttiness that comes and goes before a tangy finish. The Churchill is rolled with a tight, knotted pigtail cap.

U.S.: \$15.50 U.K.: N/A

**88****DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**A. FLORES 1975 SERIE PRIVADA CAPA  
MADURO SP 58**

A chunky, box-pressed Churchill with a dark wrapper and a musty cold draw. Notes of slate and minerals are answered by a bit of anise sweetness and a dry finish.

U.S.: \$12.75 U.K.: N/A

**87****NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**ALEC BRADLEY NICA PURO CHURCHILL**

Oily and dark, this cigar burns a bit unevenly, but imparts a heavy barnyard character of earth, hay and wheat. A bit of cedar precedes the charcoal finish.

U.S.: \$8.55 U.K.: N/A

**87****DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,  
PERU  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

**H. UPMANN VINTAGE CAMEROON  
CHURCHILL**

An earthy-tasting cigar with some tangy mineral notes and a charred oak quality. The draw and burn are even.

U.S.: \$6.73 U.K.: N/A

**87****DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**AVO XO MAESTOSO**

The draw and burn of this yellowish Churchill are even and full, but the smoke is papery and thin with vague hints of leather and light, balsa-wood finish.

U.S.: \$11.80 U.K.: N/A

**85****DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

**KRISTOFF CAMEROON CHURCHILL**

Rollled with a pigtail and uncut foot, this cigar exhibits an earthiness combined with some damp mushroom notes and a barnyard, straw-and-hay finish.

U.S.: \$9.80 U.K.: N/A

**85**



While many brand owners contract factories to produce their cigars, there isn't much collaboration. Not so in the case of Guardian of the Farm. The Apollo Selección de Warped scored 92 points and was indeed a collaborative cigar blended by both Kyle Gellis (owner of Warped Cigars) and Max Fernández, owner of the Guardian of the Farm brand and operations manager for his father's TABSA factory. The name is a playful nod to the cigarmakers' pet dogs, as well as the idea of protecting the traditions of farming and blending. The cigar serves as a showcase for tobacco grown by Aganorsa, an agricultural company in Nicaragua also owned by the Fernández family.



**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**GUARDIAN OF THE FARM  
APOLLO SELECCIÓN DE WARPED**

This corona is crafted with an uncut foot and a three-seam cap. Its lush draw delivers notes of nutmeg and cinnamon interwoven with hints of almonds and oats.  
**U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A**

92



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA  
BINDER: ECUADOR  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**LA PALINA RED LABEL PETIT LANCERO**

An attractive corona with a three-seam cap. First puffs impart notes of molasses and cinnamon before a bit of spice and a bready, toasty undercurrent.  
**U.S.: \$7.99 U.K.: N/A**

90



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**MONTECRISTO WHITE ESPECIAL NO. 3**

Each puff of this tan corona layers the palate with a dense, creamy smoke redolent of graham cracker, nutmeg and a spicy cinnamon finish. Stronger than it looks.  
**U.S.: \$8.90 U.K.: N/A**

90



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.  
BINDER: MEXICO  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**VILLIGER 1888 CORONA**

Long and skinny with a flat cap, this cigar is a melange of black tea, nuts and cinnamon intonations that usher in a dry, floral finish hinting of spice.  
**U.S.: \$5.70 U.K.: N/A**

90



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 45 LENGTH: 5 1/4"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

**ARTURO FUENTE CUBAN CORONA**

An unusually shaped corona with a blunted belicoso cap and tapered foot that flares out. It's sweet and spicy with notes of raw cocoa bean, cinnamon and a charred finish.  
**U.S.: \$5.05 U.K.: N/A**

89



**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/4"  
FILLER: CUBA  
BINDER: CUBA  
WRAPPER: CUBA  
BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2015

**H. UPMANN CORONA MAJOR**

Strong and spicy with dried red- and black-pepper qualities that lead to a charry finish. It produces a flaky gray ash with some resistance on the draw.  
**U.S.: N/A U.K.: £15.40**

89





**CUBA**  
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 5 1/2"  
FILLER: CUBA  
BINDER: CUBA  
WRAPPER: CUBA  
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2014

**ROMEO Y JULIETA ROMEO NO. 1**  
A malty, leathery-tasting corona that imparts notes of oak and graham cracker before the grassy finish. It's made with a tawny-colored wrapper and flat head.  
**U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.80**

89



**HONDURAS**  
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"  
FILLER: HONDURAS, DOM. REP.,  
BRAZIL  
BINDER: HONDURAS  
WRAPPER: MEXICO

**CAMACHO TRIPLE MADURO CORONA**  
There are some soft spots along the length of this dark, near-black corona. Earthy, acidic notes segue into woody qualities with touches of anise and raisins.  
**U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A**

88



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., MEXICO  
BINDER: MEXICO  
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

**MACANUDO CAFÉ HAMPTON COURT**  
As light in body as it looks, this corona shows a woody character, citrus tang and hints of minerals and grass.  
**U.S.: \$7.19 U.K.: N/A**

88



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

**NAT SHERMAN 1930 CORONA**  
Solidly rolled in a wrapper that gleams with oil. It's a woody smoke up front that develops citrus intonations in the form of dried orange peel and fresh lemon zest.  
**U.S.: \$8.95 U.K.: N/A**

88



**CUBA**  
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/4"  
FILLER: CUBA  
BINDER: CUBA  
WRAPPER: CUBA  
BOX DATE: JULY 2016

**TRINIDAD COLONIALES**  
Initial saltiness becomes earthy with intermittent notes of graham cracker and floral elements. The finish is a bit dry.  
**U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.70**

88



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 3/4"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**VEGAFINA NICARAGUA CORONA**  
A notably veiny cigar that draws and burns evenly. Hints of mustiness and sharp woods become earthy touches of licorice, a bit of caramel and a charry-tasting finish.  
**U.S.: \$5.78 U.K.: N/A**

88



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**MATILDE SERENA CORONA**  
Herbal and tangy, this tan corona shows notes of minerals and citrus before a faint butterscotch finish. A mild cigar.  
**U.S.: \$7.20 U.K.: N/A**

87



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,  
U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**QUESADA SELECCIÓN ESPAÑA CORONA**  
A dark tan corona with a notably firm draw. It produces an earthy smoke with a gritty texture along with some woodiness and a charry, peppery finish.  
**U.S.: \$7.25 U.K.: N/A**

87



# corona gordas

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Altadis U.S.A. is the maker and producer of two major brands in the premium cigar industry—Montecristo and Romeo y Julieta. Of course, these are the non-Cuban versions created for the U.S. market, but Altadis is ceaselessly reinventing these storied lines, creating modern interpretations and new blends that will appeal to today's smoker, but still pay homage to the history of both brands. That is always the goal and Altadis has succeeded with the Montecristo Artisan Series Batch 1 and the Romeo y Julieta 11 Years Old, both of which scored 92 points. The Montecristo was named on account of its blend being selected by specific members of the company's "artisans." The Romeo y Julieta gets its name from a number of factors. According to Altadis, the cigar was aged for 11 years before it was released, only 11,000 of these smokes were created and, to complete the theme, retails for \$11. The Brick House Maduro is owned by Tampa's J.C. Newman Cigar Co. It was intended to be a premium cigar at a reasonable price and the Toro, which scored 91 points, lived up to the brand's mission.



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., HONDURAS  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**MONTECRISTO ARTISAN SERIES BATCH 1 TORO**  
Wearing a dark and oily wrapper, this cigar burns evenly, offering sweet and malty impressions with bright notes of cinnamon and honeyed wood on the finish.  
**U.S.: \$18.00 U.K.: N/A**

92



**HONDURAS**  
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5 3/4"  
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA  
BINDER: HONDURAS  
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

**ROMEO Y JULIETA RARE 11 YEARS OLD TORO**  
A solidly rolled cigar crafted with a three-seam cap. Its full draw offers big notes of leather, almonds and dark chocolate interwoven with hints of jalapeño and spice.  
**U.S.: \$11.00 U.K.: N/A**

92



**NICARAGUA**  
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

**BRICK HOUSE MADURO TORO**  
Strong and earthy, this dark, attractive cigar also has a salt-and-pepper quality that becomes lighter and floral. The finish is bready with a hint of caramel.  
**U.S.: \$6.30 U.K.: N/A**

91



**COSTA RICA**  
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., PERU, ECUADOR, PARAGUAY  
BINDER: ECUADOR  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**GAJA TORO**  
An attractive box-pressed corona gorda with a full, even draw. Elements of nutmeg, wood and tea are supported by touches of honey and a Port wine finish.  
**U.S.: \$15.50 U.K.: N/A**

90



**NICARAGUA**  
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**HOYO LA AMISTAD TORO**  
This cigar is crafted with an excellent cap and head. Earth and nougat notes are interspersed with touches of peanut shell before a charry finish that hints of anise.  
**U.S.: \$7.79 U.K.: N/A**

90





### DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 1/2"  
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA,  
DOM. REP., PERU, U.S.A./PENN.  
BROADLEAF  
BINDER: MEXICO  
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

### PSYKO SEVEN CORONA

A richly hued corona with a streaky, oily wrapper and even burn. This is a full-bodied, meaty smoke with plenty of spice, black pepper and dried-fruit sweetness.  
U.S.: \$7.29 U.K.: N/A

90



### CUBA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"  
FILLER: CUBA  
BINDER: CUBA  
WRAPPER: CUBA  
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2016

### COHIBA SIGLO IV

Wrapped in a bright, medium-claro cover leaf, this corona gorda is fashioned with a flat head and three-seam cap. The draw is firm but offers a medium-bodied, almond-and-citrus smoke with a woody finish.  
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £29.00

89



### NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

### JOYA DE NICARAGUA ANTAÑO 1970 ROBUSTO GRANDE

The rich, woody notes of this corona gorda become earthy. The cigar also has hints of black pepper on the palate and ends with an herbal finish.  
U.S.: \$7.70 U.K.: N/A

89



### CUBA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/2"  
FILLER: CUBA  
BINDER: CUBA  
WRAPPER: CUBA  
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2016

### JUAN LOPEZ EMINENTES EXCLUSIVO SUIZA

Light impressions of nutmeg and floral notes take on a honey quality before a grassy, gummy finish. It's a fairly large toro with a three-seam cap and flat head.  
U.S.: N/A SWITZ: 24.00 Sw. Fr.

89



### NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA  
BINDER: BRAZIL  
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

### LIGA PRIVADA NO. 9 TORO OSCURO (TUBO)

The visible pores on the wrapper of this solid cigar give it a rustic appearance. It's a woody and spicy smoke with plenty of earth and an herbal finish. Not as strong as it looks.  
U.S.: \$16.00 U.K.: N/A

89



### CUBA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"  
FILLER: CUBA  
BINDER: CUBA  
WRAPPER: CUBA  
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2016

### PUNCH PUNCH

First puffs of this softly pressed cigar are floral and cedary. Richer notes of leather and nuts become slightly metallic on the finish.  
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £19.03

89



### NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 1/2"  
FILLER: ECUADOR  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

### ESPINOSA ALPHA DAWG CORONA GORDA

An attractive corona gorda crafted with a three-seam cap. Notes of cinnamon and bread combine with slight touches of cedar and fruit.  
U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A

88



### DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

### PATORO GRAN AÑEJO RESERVA NO. 4 TORO

Reddish in appearance, this cedary smoke has an earthy, minty characteristic with a peppermint tea finish.  
U.S.: \$18.36 U.K.: N/A

88



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# figurados

Figurados were by far the most remarkable category in this issue, as nearly every cigar scored higher than 90 points. The shapes encompass everything from double-tapered Salomones to standard pyramids to more unorthodox forms. The Ashton Heritage Puro Sol Belicoso No. 2, scored 93 points. This brand doesn't seem to get as much attention as Ashton's other lines, and it's unfortunate. The short torpedo is loaded with flavor and is a lot more full bodied than its wrapper suggests. Also scoring 93 points was the Plasencia Alma Fuerte Generacion V. It's full of alluring tapers and plenty of strong tobacco that makes as much of a bold statement as the cigar's appearance.



## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 4 7/8"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

## ASHTON HERITAGE PURO SOL BELICOSO NO. 2

Robust and earthy with a leathery quality spiced up by notes of cardamom, cinnamon and a minty finish. A medium- to full-bodied cigar.  
U.S.: \$9.85 U.K.: N/A

93



## NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 7"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

## PLASENCIA ALMA FUERTE GENERACION V

A large Salomon wearing a toothy wrapper. The cigar burns evenly, offering big notes of cocoa powder, leather and toast. There is a pleasing minerality on the finish.  
U.S.: \$22.00 U.K.: N/A

93



## NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 3/4"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

## CASA MAGNA COLORADO DIADEMA

Beautiful to behold with perfect tapers, a dark, reddish-brown wrapper and a knotted pigtail cap. Earthy, oaky underpinnings are overlaid by notes of nuts, coffee and vanilla.  
U.S.: \$10.12 U.K.: N/A

92



## HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: COSTA RICA

## THE EDGE MADURO MISSILE

A mini torpedo with a strong earthy, salt-and-pepper smoke that also leaves notes of hickory and molasses on the palate.  
U.S.: \$6.40 U.K.: N/A

92



## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 39 LENGTH: 6 1/4"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

## FUENTE FUENTE OPUSX PETIT LANCERO

A long, thin cigar that resembles a spike with its abruptly pointy head. Its even draw and burn offers a strong spicy smoke sweetened by hints of dried berries and maple.  
U.S.: \$11.50 U.K.: N/A

91



## CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"  
FILLER: CUBA  
BINDER: CUBA  
WRAPPER: CUBA  
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

## H. UPMANN NO. 2

The light cocoa notes of this good-looking piramide become heavier and more medium bodied with a cappuccino character and an earthy finish.  
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £23.21

91





**CUBA**  
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/4"  
FILLER: CUBA  
BINDER: CUBA  
WRAPPER: CUBA  
BOX DATE: MAY 2016

**MONTECRISTO PETIT NO. 2**  
A mini torpedo with a gorgeous wrapper. The smoke is dense and chewy showing contrasting, yet substantial notes of almonds, earth and white pepper that become more profound with each puff.  
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £20.00

91



**NICARAGUA**  
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**PADRÓN DÁMASO NO. 34**  
A very pointy torpedo covered in blond Connecticut-seed wrapper. It's a predominantly nutty smoke with spicy hints of clove that lead to a toasty almond finish.  
U.S.: \$14.50 U.K.: N/A

91



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 4 3/8"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**ASHTON VIRGIN SUN GROWN ENCHANTMENT**  
The muted woody notes of the squat perfecto become more pronounced after the cigar burns past the nipple foot, along with touches of coconut, cocoa and saffron.  
U.S.: \$12.50 U.K.: N/A

90



**CUBA**  
RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 6 1/4"  
FILLER: CUBA  
BINDER: CUBA  
WRAPPER: CUBA  
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2016

**HOYO DE MONTERREY ELEGANTES**  
Slender and tapered at both ends, this figurado forms a flaky ash as it burns. The smoke is floral and woody with light notes of cocoa and graham cracker that lead to a sweet, s'mores-like finish.  
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £21.30

90



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/2"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**LA FLOR DOMINICANA RESERVA ESPECIAL FIGURADO**  
Rolled with a thin, elongated torpedo head, this cigar shows a green-apple fruitiness before taking on bold, full-bodied notes of pepper, minerals and leather.  
U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A

90



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

**GURKHA CELLAR RESERVE 21 YEAR KRAKEN**  
Crafted with a blond wrapper and a coiled pigtail cap, this fat figurado shows a lemony, zesty character with hints of fruit and nuts but the finish is slightly papery.  
U.S.: \$16.50 U.K.: N/A

89



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

**LA PALINA EL AÑO 1896 OSCURO BELICOSO**  
This dark, box-pressed torpedo has an even draw and burn that shows earthy, toasty notes with hints of chocolate and raisins. The finish is short and a bit chalky.  
U.S.: \$9.99 U.K.: N/A

89



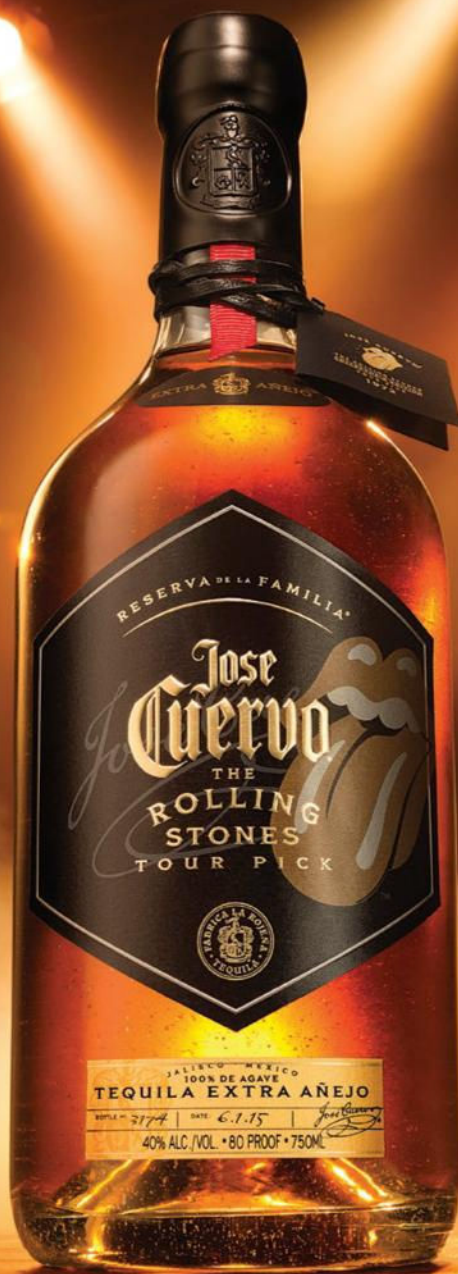
**NICARAGUA**  
RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 5 3/4"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: BRAZIL, MEXICO  
WRAPPER: MEXICO

**TABAQUERO HAMLET PAREDES BALA**  
A dark figurado with an unusual, closed foot that's been prepunched. It's fairly bold and earthy, imparting hints of citrus and a charry, mineral finish.  
U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A

88



THE TOUR THAT BECAME LEGEND  
THE DRINK  
THAT FUELED IT



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# grandes

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It's time for traditionalists to accept reality: 6-by-60 cigars are here to stay. Every major brand produces at least one, and most of them are outselling the classic, thinner sizes. That's not necessarily a reason to fret. Some huge cigars are packed with fantastic tobacco, and cigarmakers seem to be getting better at blending in such hefty proportions. The My Father The Judge Grand Robusto is a perfect example. It scored 93 points for a rich, memorable performance that stimulated the entire palate from the sweet to the savory. Its blocky trunk-pressing only serves to accentuate the cigar's thickness. The box-pressed CLE Prieto 60x6 scored 91 points and has the same chunky appearance but a different flavor profile—notes of exotic spices are brought together by a foundation of earth and chocolate.



## NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 5"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

## MY FATHER THE JUDGE GRAND ROBUSTO

Pressed and blocky, this big robusto is topped with a three-seam cap. Notes of chocolate and gingersnap play off each other with hints of red pepper and almonds.

U.S.: \$12.40 U.K.: N/A

93



## NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

## CLE PRIETO 60X6

Exotic herbs of saffron and cardamom are fortified by toasty earthiness and a sweet, chocolate and coconut finish. A medium- to full-bodied smoke that stays interesting from first puff to last.

U.S.: \$9.36 U.K.: N/A

91



## NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

## CASA MAGNA JALAPA CLARO GRAN TORO

This tawny-colored toro draws and burns evenly, delivering notes of toast, nuts and wood woven with touches of spice and fruit. The finish hints of graham cracker.

U.S.: \$7.65 U.K.: N/A

90



## NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

## FOUNDRY TIME FLIES GIGANTE

A dark log of a cigar with a dead-even draw and burn. It's bracingly strong and earthy with a touch of acidity that calms down to show some fruit and more earth.

U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A

90



## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.,  
BRAZIL  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

## MACANUDO CRÜ ROYALE GIGANTE

All the earthy, nutty and woody notes of this large, girthy cigar lead to a notably floral finish that resonates on the palate. A medium-bodied smoke.

U.S.: \$7.79 U.K.: N/A

90



**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6 1/4"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**PADRÓN 7000**

Rich notes of cedar and hard woods set the underlying tone for this leathery, peppery cigar. A medium- to full-bodied smoke.  
U.S.: \$8.40 U.K.: N/A

**90****NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**SAN CRISTOBAL QUINTESSENCE MAJESTIC**

This fat cigar is rolled with a pristine wrapper and topped with a three-seam cap. Notes of leather and oak are underscored by touches of walnut and pistachio.  
U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A

**90****NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 5"  
FILLER: BRAZIL, NICARAGUA  
BINDER: ECUADOR  
WRAPPER: MEXICO

**MY UZI WEIGHS A TON 5X60**

Earthy and oaky, this fat cigar gives off a faintly metallic aroma as it burns. There are hints of brown sugar and touches of spice as well.  
U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

**89****DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**RAMON ALLONES HERITAGE SERIES 660**

An earthy smoke with initial acidity that dissipates to show a toastier side with sweet hints of toffee. The finish is short and light.  
U.S.: \$7.49 U.K.: N/A

**89****HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: COLOMBIA, NICARAGUA, HONDURAS  
BINDER: COSTA RICA  
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

**ALEC BRADLEY SANCTUM GORDO**

A fat, tan log of a cigar with bready notes of nutmeg and cinnamon that dissipate for an airy finish.  
U.S.: \$8.95 U.K.: N/A

**87****NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**CAIN F 660**

Thick and hefty, this cigar offers a mostly toasty smoke elevated by sweet nuttiness but offset by persistent acidity.  
U.S.: \$9.67 U.K.: N/A

**87****DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 62 LENGTH: 5"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**INCH COLORADO BY E.P. CARRILLO NO. 62**

Short, squat and veiny with many soft spots. The draw is airy, imparting earthy, woody notes, a touch of damp mustiness and a semisweet chocolate finish.  
U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A

**87**



# robustos

The two top-scoring cigars were achieved by two of the most high-profile brands in the cigar industry: Romeo y Julieta and Montecristo. They are the flagship lines of Altadis U.S.A., the company responsible for creating the non-Cuban versions of these heritage cigars for the U.S. market. The Romeo Añejo by Romeo y Julieta Robusto scored 91 points and, according to Altadis, was made with vintage-specific tobaccos. The broadleaf wrapper is from a 2010 vintage, the olor binder from a 2008 crop and the filler tobacco harvested in 2009. Añejo literally translates to “old” in Spanish, but the connotation implies that the tobaccos are aged for refinement. The Montecristo Platinum may not be one of Montecristo’s newest versions, but the Robusto scored 90 points for its steady, balanced performance that began savory and ended sweet. The surprise here is the wrapper—it’s Mexican San Andrés. Most tend to think of dark maduros whenever this particular wrapper is mentioned, but the Platinum’s Mexican San Andrés is far lighter in appearance than normal. The bit of Peruvian tobacco within the filler also adds some distinction.



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

## ROMEO AÑEJO BY ROMEO Y JULIETA ROBUSTO

Creamy and cedary with a gingerbread sweetness and an underlying earthiness. The draw of this full-bodied smoke is even and effortless.

U.S.: \$9.48 U.K.: N/A

91



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"  
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,  
PERU  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: MEXICO

## MONTECRISTO PLATINUM ROBUSTO

The toasty, almond-like smoke of this dark, oily robusto becomes earthy with raw cocoa bean notes that build to a finish of honey and wood.

U.S.: \$9.02 U.K.: N/A

90



**CUBA**  
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"  
FILLER: CUBA  
BINDER: CUBA  
WRAPPER: CUBA  
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

## BOLIVAR ROYAL CORONA

A softly pressed robusto with rounded edges. The draw is a bit firm but still imparts a floral smoke that becomes richer with pistachio notes, earth and black pepper.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.11

89



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**  
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"  
FILLER: DOM. REP.  
BINDER: DOM. REP.  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

## DAVIDOFF 702 SERIES ANIVERSARIO SPECIAL R

Tightly packed and symmetrically rolled with a round head. It's a combination of big woody notes, sweet raisins and a reedy finish.

U.S.: \$21.40 U.K.: N/A

89



**NICARAGUA**  
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4 7/8"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: HONDURAS  
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

## HERRERA ESTELI SHORT CORONA GORDA

The draw of this attractive, three-seam robusto is lush and flawless. Sweet almond notes are balanced by earth and leather, though the finish is dry and woody.

U.S.: \$8.08 U.K.: N/A

89



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|                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
|    | <p><b>NICARAGUA</b><br/>RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5"<br/>FILLER: NICARAGUA<br/>BINDER: NICARAGUA<br/>WRAPPER: NICARAGUA</p>                                      | <p><b>LAST CALL MADURO BY A.J. FERNANDEZ PEQUEÑAS</b><br/>Bready and yeasty with a sweet combination of chocolate and toffee and a dry, woody finish. It's made with an uncut foot and forms a flaky white ash.<br/>U.S.: \$5.70 U.K.: N/A</p>           | <p>89</p> |
|    | <p><b>DOMINICAN REPUBLIC</b><br/>RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 4 1/2"<br/>FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA<br/>BINDER: DOM. REP.<br/>WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF</p> | <p><b>OLIVEROS ALL STARS SMALL BATCH DUET NO. 5 ARIA</b><br/>Wearing a dark, oily wrapper, this cigar has a lush draw that delivers leather and black pepper notes balanced by hints of chocolate and a touch of raisins.<br/>U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A</p> | <p>89</p> |
|    | <p><b>HONDURAS</b><br/>RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/4"<br/>FILLER: HONDURAS, DOM. REP., NICARAGUA<br/>BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO<br/>WRAPPER: HONDURAS</p>     | <p><b>HOYO DE TRADICIÓN EPICURE</b><br/>Topped with a notably sloppy cap, this tan, box-pressed robusto is a combination of rich oakiness and sweet nutty notes that turn charry.<br/>U.S.: \$6.39 U.K.: N/A</p>                                         | <p>88</p> |
|   | <p><b>HONDURAS</b><br/>RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"<br/>FILLER: NICARAGUA<br/>BINDER: NICARAGUA<br/>WRAPPER: ECUADOR</p>                                         | <p><b>PADILLA CONNECTICUT ROBUSTO</b><br/>A bit spotty and dirty in appearance, this blondish cigar draws and burns evenly, offering a mostly woody character with a bit of fruit on the finish.<br/>U.S.: \$6.25 U.K.: N/A</p>                          | <p>88</p> |
|  | <p><b>NICARAGUA</b><br/>RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5"<br/>FILLER: NICARAGUA<br/>BINDER: NICARAGUA<br/>WRAPPER: ECUADOR</p>                                        | <p><b>EL TRIUNFADOR NO. 4</b><br/>A box-pressed robusto with a dark, reddish wrapper. It's an earthy, woody smoke with hints of pistachio and Mideastern spices, but persistent damp notes affected the score.<br/>U.S.: \$7.50 U.K.: N/A</p>            | <p>87</p> |
|  | <p><b>CUBA</b><br/>RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"<br/>FILLER: CUBA<br/>BINDER: CUBA<br/>WRAPPER: CUBA<br/>BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016</p>                         | <p><b>PARTAGÁS SERIE D NO. 4</b><br/>Toasty and woody, this robusto takes on tangy, lemon and gingersnap qualities, but the finish is a bit gritty in texture. A low score for this particular cigar.<br/>U.S.: N/A U.K.: £19.35</p>                     | <p>87</p> |
|  | <p><b>CUBA</b><br/>RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5"<br/>FILLER: CUBA<br/>BINDER: CUBA<br/>WRAPPER: CUBA<br/>BOX DATE: MARCH 2016</p>                                 | <p><b>VEGAS ROBAINA FAMOSO</b><br/>The visible pores and gnarly veins of the wrapper give this cigar a very rustic appearance. Some nutmeg and walnut notes are discernible, but muted, as is the herbal finish.<br/>U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.82</p>          | <p>87</p> |
|  | <p><b>DOMINICAN REPUBLIC</b><br/>RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"<br/>FILLER: NICARAGUA<br/>BINDER: NICARAGUA<br/>WRAPPER: NICARAGUA</p>                             | <p><b>DAVIDOFF NICARAGUA ROBUSTO</b><br/>A woody, salty smoke with mineral notes and a short, dry finish. It's an oily robusto with a round head and even draw.<br/>U.S.: \$15.60 U.K.: N/A</p>                                                          | <p>86</p> |



Cigars are listed first by country and then by score. Please refer to the main tasting pages for notes and prices.

### CIGAR AFICIONADO'S 100-POINT SCALE

Classic  
95–100  
Outstanding  
90–94  
Very good to excellent  
80–89  
Average to good  
commercial quality  
70–79  
Don't waste your money  
60–70  
Not available  
n/a

*Note: all prices are  
manufacturers' suggested  
retail, before taxes.*

### COSTA RICA

90 Gaaja Toro

### CUBA

91 H. Upmann No. 2  
91 Montecristo Petit No. 2  
90 Hoyo de Monterrey Elegantes  
89 Bolivar Royal Corona  
89 Cohiba Siglo IV  
89 H. Upmann Corona Major  
89 Juan Lopez Eminentes Exclusivo Suiza  
89 Punch Punch  
89 Romeo y Julieta Romeo No. 1  
88 Trinidad Colonias  
87 Partagás Serie D No. 4  
87 Vegas Robaina Famoso

### DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

93 Ashton Heritage Puro Sol Belicoso No. 2  
92 Montecristo Artisan Series Batch 1 Toro  
91 Fuente Fuente OpusX Petit Lancero  
91 Romeo Añejo by Romeo y Julieta Robusto  
90 Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Enchantment  
90 La Flor Dominicana Reserva Especial Figurado  
90 La Palina Red Label Petit Lancero  
90 Macanudo Crü Royale Gigante  
90 Montecristo Platinum Robusto  
90 Montecristo White Especial No. 3  
90 Psyko Seven Corona  
90 Villiger 1888 Corona  
89 Arturo Fuente Cuban Corona  
89 Davidoff 702 Series Aniversario Special R  
89 E.P. Carrillo Core Plus Churchill Especial No. 7  
89 Gurkha Cellar Reserve 21 Year Kraken  
89 La Flor Dominicana Double Ligero Oscuro Natural Especial  
89 La Palina El Año 1896 Oscuro Belicoso  
89 Oliveros All Stars Small Batch Duet No. 5 Aria  
89 Ramon Allones Heritage Series 660  
88 La Aurora 100 Años Churchill  
88 Macanudo Café Hampton Court  
88 Nat Sherman 1930 Corona  
88 Patoro Gran Añejo Reserva No. 4 Toro  
88 The Last Tsar Churchill  
88 VegaFina Nicaragua Corona  
87 A. Flores 1975 Serie Privada Capa Maduro SP 58

87 H. Upmann Vintage Cameroon Churchill  
87 Inch Colorado by E.P. Carrillo No. 62  
87 Matilde Serena Corona  
87 Quesada Selección España Corona  
86 Davidoff Nicaragua Robusto  
85 Avo XO Maestoso  
85 Kristoff Cameroon Churchill

### HONDURAS

93 Macanudo Inspirado Orange Churchill  
92 Romeo y Julieta Rare 11 Years Old Toro  
92 The Edge Maduro Missile  
88 Camacho Triple Maduro Corona  
88 Hoyo de Tradición Epicure  
88 Padilla Connecticut Robusto  
87 Alec Bradley Sanctum Gordo

### NICARAGUA

93 My Father The Judge Grand Robusto  
93 Plasencia Alma Fuerte Generacion V  
92 Casa Magna Colorado Diadema  
92 Guardian of the Farm Apollo Selección de Warped  
92 Oliva Serie V Melanio Maduro Churchill  
91 Brick House Maduro Toro  
91 CLE Prieto 60x6  
91 Illusione 888  
91 Nat Sherman Panamericana Julieta  
91 Padrón Dámaso No. 34  
90 Casa Magna Jalapa Claro Gran Toro  
90 Foundry Time Flies Gigante  
90 Hoyo La Amistad Toro  
90 La Antiguiedad Super Toro  
90 Padrón 7000  
90 San Cristobal Quintessence Majestic  
89 Herrera Esteli Short Corona Gorda  
89 Joya de Nicaragua Antaño 1970 Robusto Grande  
89 Last Call Maduro by A.J. Fernandez Pequeñas  
89 Liga Privada No. 9 Toro Oscuro (Tubo)  
89 My Uzi Weighs a Ton 5x60  
88 Espinosa Alpha Dawg Corona Gorda  
88 Tabaquero Hamlet Paredes Bala  
87 Alec Bradley Nica Puro Churchill  
87 Cain F 660  
87 El Triunfador No. 4



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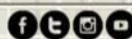


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# connoisseur's corner

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There was no shortage of classic ratings in this exceptional group of vintage cigars. Standing at the top is a well-aged Cohiba Lancero. In its 25th year, the smoke remains powerful, full of the hearty flavors that made Cohiba one of the world's most famous brands. Right behind is a Montecristo No. 2 of similar age, another cigar that has aged very well and remains vibrant, with plenty of promise to come. The oldest cigar in the bunch, a 52-year-old Punch that was one of the house smokes of Dublin/London retailer J.J. Fox, was far more delicate, showing flavors of honeyed dessert wine on the finish. And in case you think only Cuban cigars age well, look at the score for the 2003 Tatuaje, which was rolled in Miami. It has aged just as well as the smokes from Havana.



## COHIBA LANCERO (1992)

One of the original Cohiba sizes, and the favorite of former Cuban President Fidel Castro. This smoke is a nearly perfect version of the panetela. It is still a powerhouse. The smoke exhibits a mouth-filling combination of coffee beans and earthiness, with black pepper on the long finish, and just a touch of leather. A great cigar. —*Gordon Mott*

98



## MONTECRISTO NO. 2 (1991)

Just a completely different smoke from current production Montes. This cigar had a natural box press on it from its long aging. The wrapper was oily to the touch, and dark and glistening to the eye. There was a smooth pencil lead mineral note that evolved into a dark earthiness and cocoa bean flavors. Plenty of life left. —*Gordon Mott*

97



## PUNCH NÉCTARES NO. 2 (1965)

A cigar of this age needs some time to warm up. It's delicate to start, but about one inch in it starts to open up and show off its former majesty. Almond paste, buttered nuts, honey and vanilla show up on the palate, along with a touch of earth. The cigar's sweetness increases as it burns, giving it a finish reminiscent of a Sauternes. A delightful taste of history. —*David Savona*

96



## ROMEO Y JULIETA CHURCHILL (2010)

This classic cigar had a beautiful colorado wrapper. There were strong nut and coffee bean notes trending toward espresso on the mid-palate. There was also a lush sweetness on the long finish, almost like papaya; interesting and delicious. —*Gordon Mott*

96



## TATUAJE UNICOS (2003)

Time may have toned down this tightly packed figurado, but it still offers plenty of flavor and pop. The cigar burns razor sharp, showing soft earth notes up front with a pleasant raisin sweetness. The nose offers a distinct cinnamon spice and faint almond notes. Citrus and leather come in at the midpoint, followed by a chewy nougat finish. Simply delicious. —*Andrew Nagy*

96



## H. UPMANN MAGNUM 46 (2005)

A sharp-eyed friend found these in the corner of a Havana cigar shop not long ago. The cigar has a delicate, nutty start, then blossoms to showcase café au lait, light cinnamon and salty pretzel notes. A balanced and wonderfully elegant cigar with a brown-sugar finish that should remind you to always poke around when you're cigar shopping. —*David Savona*

94



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# The Brand Man Returns

Jonathan Drew, a little older and a little wiser, is back as president of Drew Estate

BY ANDREW NAGY  
PORTRAITS BY JEFFERY SALTER

## Sixteen square feet.

That was all the space Jonathan Drew had to work with when he opened a cigar kiosk in The Mall at the World Trade Center back in 1995. Little did he know how much that kiosk would alter the course of his life, as he would forgo a career in law and build such popular cigar brands as ACID, Liga Privada, Herrera Esteli and Undercrown.

But on this day, an unseasonably warm February morning in Lower Manhattan, Drew stands beside the manmade waterfalls of the 9/11 Memorial, where the Twin Towers once stood. Wearing whitewashed jeans, a graphic T-shirt and a stark white sport coat, topped with a matching white winter hat and blue-tinted glasses, his outfit would stick out in the typical cigar shop. But on the streets of New York City, he is just another disparate soul in the throng. It's been more than a decade since he's been back in this area, and he fondly remembers the time when he was "the cigar guy" in the North Tower.

"I called my kiosk QC Cigar Company. I told everyone it stood for quality control," he says, "but really it was Queen's Counsel." This was a nod to the fact that, while he was running the kiosk, he was also studying at Brooklyn Law School to become an attorney.

Originally, he had planned to open a cigar shop near home in Brooklyn Heights, but he got a lead that the World Trade Center was looking for vendors to populate its newly rebuilt concourse level. He seized the opportunity and signed a \$2,200-a-month lease for the prime retail spot, with the cigar boom in full swing. The kiosk sold brands such as H. Upmann, Macanudo, Flor de Florez, La Gloria Cubana, Fonseca and Davidoff. "Ninety-five percent of my leads as to who to call to buy cigars from came from CIGAR AFICIONADO," he says. "The ads at the bottom would always have a telephone number to call. Back then there were no websites, but everyone had a telephone number."

---

Jonathan Drew grew up on Long Island before he pursued his cigar dreams all the way to Nicaragua. Today, he calls Miami's modish Wynwood neighborhood home.







At over 96,000 square feet, La Gran Fabrica Drew Estate is the largest factory in Nicaragua, producing an estimated 170,000 cigars per day, entirely by hand.

Drew's phraseology is unique in the cigar industry. At times he sounds more like he's performing a braggadocio rap in a hip-hop song than answering a question or marketing a new product. Hidden underneath the verbal onslaught are the workings of a highly intelligent businessman who is not afraid to loudly share his opinions, even if he sometimes refers to himself in the third person.

"J.D. had an office at 196 Broadway. I had a dolly that I'd stack with cigar boxes and bundles," he says, pantomiming the laborious process with exaggerated movements and a smile. "Then I'd walk down Dey Street, or sometimes past the [St. Paul's Chapel] graveyard. I'd dump it out, right in the middle of the Trade Center, slice the boxes and restock the kiosk."

On Saturdays Drew would boost his income by hawking wares that weren't selling at his parents' Long Island antique shop at a street fair in Manhattan. "On Sundays, I would sleep sometimes for 24 hours. So, my work ethic—that's when it really kicked in."

His hustle paid off as his tiny kiosk did roughly \$580,000 in sales in the first year. "Cigars were so hot at the time that I had lines like McDonald's." But Drew wanted his own brand. "The antiques, I knew that wasn't going to be my path forward. The law? I absolutely hated that stuff, but I did it for the cash."

In came Marvin Samel, who had attended the State University of New York at Oneonta with Drew and was working as a mortgage broker at the time. The pair had become fraternity brothers while in school, with Samel graduating a year behind Drew. Samel helped Drew to buy out an early investor in the kiosk, and the pair formed Drew Estate Inc. in 1996. He finished his legal studies that year, choosing to attend his graduation only for five minutes ("I had work to do.") The duo then enlisted La Rosa Cigars, an old-time chinchalle located on Sixth Avenue in Manhattan, to create their first brand: La Vieja Habana. Drew says he named it for the city-center of Old Havana, which in Spanish is *Habana Vieja*. To better

appeal to customers, though, he switched the order of the Spanish words to mimic one of his favorite brands at the time: La Gloria Cubana.

At this point, Drew also became an independent sales representative for Nick Perdomo of Nick's Cigar Co. (now Perdomo Cigars). His territory included 15 states, and he hired a team to help visit cigar shops. He instructed the sales reps to also sell his La Vieja brand. While the strategy boosted La Vieja's reputation, finances were spread thin. "I had all these people working for me; that's why I was losing money," he says.

In the second year, the kiosk did more than \$810,000 in sales, but much of that was done wholesale to other cigar shops. "When we added up all of our costs, we were actually losing money by selling wholesale to other shops," Samel told CIGAR AFICIONADO in 2010.

To keep the La Vieja brand, production was moved to Perdomo's Tabacalera Perdomo factory in Nicaragua. The brand received critical praise, scoring 89 points in a May 1998 *Cigar Insider* tasting, and sold well. But as it was taking off, Hurricane Mitch hit Central America, and production halted.

"I had a transitional moment—it wasn't even a tipping point," he says, delving into his signature circular reasoning. "Because when you think of a tipping point, you kind of think of a line in the sand. But that line in the sand is very blurry, brotha. It's like falling in love with a woman. It's not like you fall in love with a woman and say, 'That's it!' Falling in love with being a manufacturer of something, back when I got into it, in a world where there were no gringo guys making cigars. It was really mind warped."

Determined, he borrowed \$100,000 and headed to Nicaragua to learn as much as possible about cigar production.

Jonathan Drew was born Jonathan Sann on July 5, 1969 in Babylon, Long Island, New York. Growing up in Suffolk County, he went to school in Southampton, while his parents ran their antique store. Throughout his childhood, the household was filled with aged wares.



"It was packed to the rafters," he says. "[My parents] kept all their antiques in banana boxes. Chiquita banana boxes, stacked up to the ceiling. You'd have a line from the kitchen to the living room; kitchen to the stairway. So, there was nowhere to move in my house. I hated those banana boxes."

His parents' collection of antiques may have hindered his youthful mobility, but he believes they taught him to not only appreciate history, but to understand "the moment in time when something was created and why it was created and what was the lineage behind the product."

A self-described "thrasher kid," Drew was a fan of heavy metal music at a time when it began to converge with hip-hop. While the lyrics, the bravado, the feuds and the rawness of hip-hop spoke to him, Drew also had great admiration for the producers behind the artists and how they distributed and cross-promoted musicians.

After high school, Drew headed to SUNY Oneonta as a political science major with a minor in business. In the final semester of his senior year, he landed an internship working under then New York Sen. Alfonse D'Amato in Washington, D.C. "[His staff] used to call me 'Baby Alfonse' because they said I looked a lot like him," recalls Drew.

One night, as he was waiting for the Senator outside a function, D'Amato's driver reached into the politician's stash of cigars. He handed Drew his first cigar, a Partagás Serie D No. 4, and the two lit up. It was love at first puff.

"The first cigar was beautiful," says Drew. "That's the thing: If you start off with a good stick that isn't overpowering, doesn't knock you on your ass—you know, turn you off—the chances of you becoming a cigar enjoyer is higher."

Drew envisioned himself entering politics and enrolled in law school. He worked on D'Amato's 1992 reelection campaign, and as a legal assistant from 10:30 at night to 7:30 in the morning, three or four nights a week. "It was going to be a career job. I got \$15 an hour and \$18 a night for dinner," he says. "I opened the kiosk to be able to pay for law school, which is expensive. Plus, I needed cash in hand, because I always liked the ladies and I liked to go out and I liked to have fly gear." He winks.

And, of course, he continued to smoke cigars, everything from H. Upmann Lonsdales to Cuban Davidoffs. But he wasn't just a casual smoker, but a lover of the leaf who had a deep interest in learning about the stories behind the cigars.

"Brands excite me. Brands get into me. I would walk into the stores and pepper the owner or the manager or whoever was in the store, with so many questions about the history of the brand," Drew says. "I was really bombarding them with questions that were not so much about how does the cigar taste. I was more interested in the who and the why. I valued [a brand owner's] lineage. I valued their journey. I valued their results."

At this time another medium also caught his eye: graffiti. Drew would puff a cigar and walk through Manhattan's SoHo neighborhood, craning his neck to see the intricate tags, murals and stencils of various street artists. Some of the art resonated deep with Drew. "There's a rawness to graffiti that I need," he says.

**T**oday, Estelí, Nicaragua is a thriving municipality, teeming with dozens of cigar factories surrounded by tobacco fields. In 1998, when Drew arrived, it was a vastly different landscape, with only a few cigar companies that called it home, almost all owned by expatriate Cubans. "I was the only gringo out in Estelí," Drew says, proudly. "Go out to Estelí today, and you bump into this guy or this gringo guy. Back then, there was nobody."

Drew proved himself through hard work and dedication, at times even sleeping on a mattress on the floor of a room in the Tabacalera Perdomo factory as he worked to develop a cigar brand that combined his affinity for hip-hop and street art: ACID. He had conceived the brand with Samel and friend Scott "Acid" Chester, a New York-based designer.

ACID cigars are infused with essential oils, herbs and botanicals, but unlike a typical flavored cigar, they are handmade and use long filler tobaccos. The various lines are adorned with brightly colored bands reminiscent of graffiti. When ACID debuted at the 1999 cigar trade show, it was an immediate success. Many millions of ACID cigars have been sold since, and it is fair to credit the brand with making the infused cigar market as large as it is today.

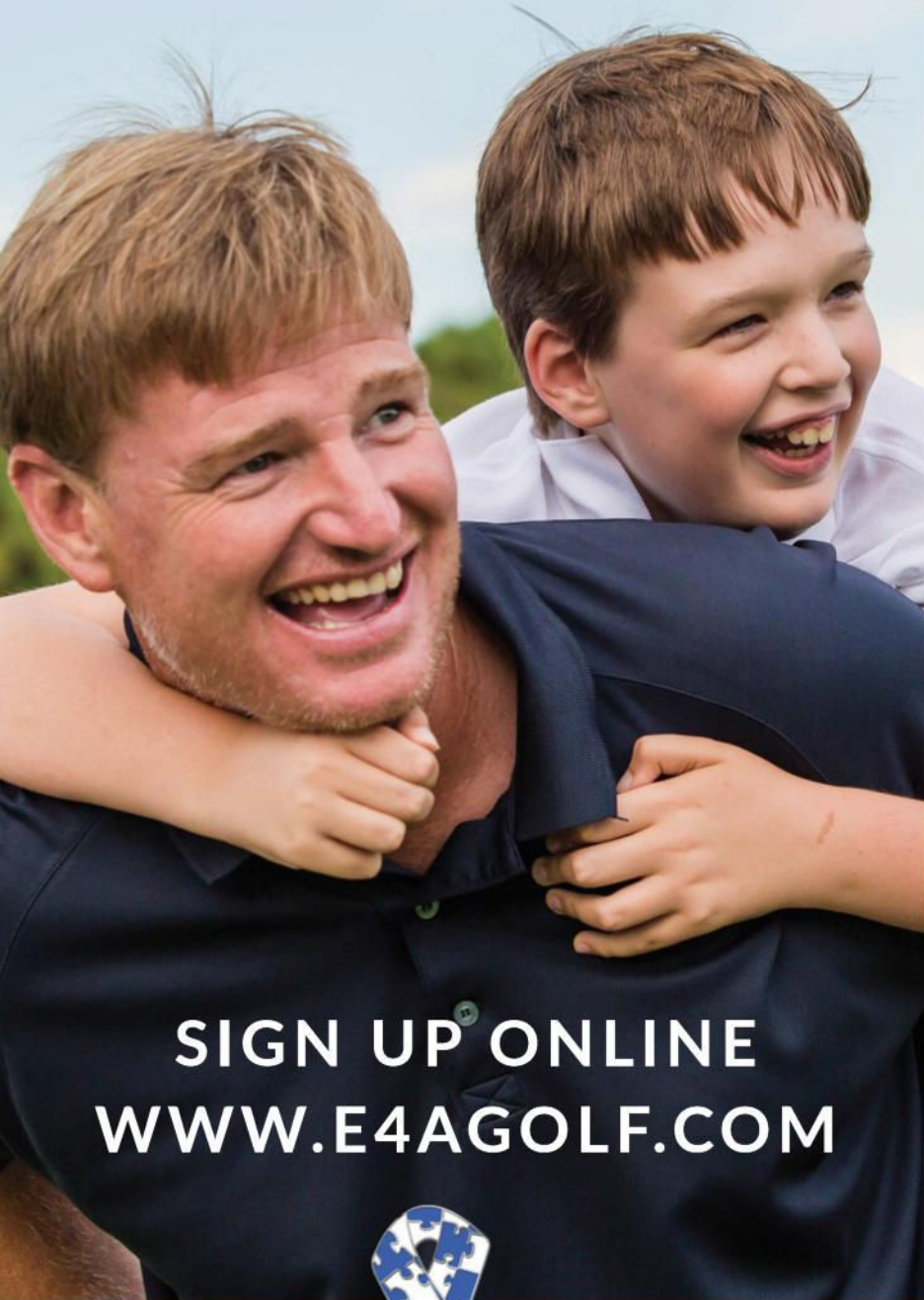
"At first I didn't think it would sell," says Jeff Borysiewicz, who owns four cigar retail stores in Florida, including the enormous Corona Cigar Co. in Orlando. "I just didn't know about the name. But it sells phenomenal and is popular with all kinds of smokers, young guys to middle-aged men."



Housed within the La Gran Fabrica Drew Estate is Subculture Studios, headed by Jessi Flores (top photo, center). The studio employs dozens of local graffiti artists to design cigar packaging, accessories and point-of-sale concepts, and even tag the occasional wall.



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In 2005, Drew and his company decided it was time to dive into the traditional cigar market. “We were known as the ACID guys, or the infused guys. We wanted to be the Drew Estate cigar company. People wondered why we didn’t just make ACID. Less inventory, less problems,” he says. “But it wasn’t fun just to make that. I have a lot of things I got to make. If you’re an artist, you’re not doing only one show. You want to get to the next thing.”

The following year the company debuted Château Real, an eight-size line that averaged 87 points in a May *Cigar Insider* vertical tasting. However, it was not the mega-hit Drew had hoped for, and he refers to it as “a total failure.”

Drew believes Château is a good cigar (the company still makes it), but that it was too safe a bet when it debuted. It didn’t possess any swagger or style, two attributes that Drew sees that help define part of the core values of Drew Estate. He learned from the experience.

“You could make the best tasting cigar on the planet, but if your aesthetics aren’t right—packaging, graphics, the boxes and the place that it takes you to, if that ain’t right, no matter how good the cigar, it’s just probably not going to be a super successful brand. The trifecta is when you make a cigar that tastes really great, package it and position it well, and you make the cigar a winner, meaning great construction.”

Drew and his team hit a trifecta with the brand they released in 2007: Liga Privada No. 9. While many companies were touting puros, Liga was a four-country blend that included Brazilian Mata Fina (rarely used at the time) wrapped in expensive, tantalizingly dark, broadleaf tobacco grown in Connecticut. It debuted in one size, a 6-inch-by-52-ring-gauge parejo. The bands appeared to be handwritten and resembled labels found in distillation plants or tasting laboratories. The brand quickly became a cult hit.

“Guys that smoke ACID don’t just smoke only that brand,” says Borysiewicz. “They trust Drew Estate, and many will plunk down the money to give Liga a shot.”

Even more importantly, Liga’s success demonstrated to the cigar industry that Drew Estate could compete in the traditional market. Drew sees Liga Privada No. 9, which he estimates sells about 500,000 each year, as the company’s “OpusX.” Fans eagerly await new shipments of Liga Privada and its offshoots, T52 and the Único Serie. In 2013 and 2014, Liga Privada topped *Cigar Insider*’s retailer survey when it was named Hottest Brand in the United States. Additionally, the cigar continues to score well within the pages of *CIGAR AFICIONADO*, earning a spot in the magazine’s Top 25 Cigars of the Year list in 2014 and 2015.

The same year that Liga Privada hit the market, Drew Estate consolidated its cigar production when it moved into a new production facility named La Gran Fabrica Drew Estate, which today is the largest handmade cigar factory in Nicaragua, if not the world. In the years to follow, Drew Estate would build on Liga Privada’s success with a slew of brands that stand out in their own ways.

While most cigar blends are conceived by a designated blender, a team of blenders or a brand owner, Undercrown started off as a cigar that the factory’s rollers created for themselves. It has many of the same tobaccos found in Liga, but replaces the wrapper with Mexican San Andrés.

In 2011, the company launched My Uzi Weighs a Ton (MUWAT), named after a lyric from a Public Enemy song. The line debuted in three lengths all at 60-ring gauge and packed in plain brown paper. “People freaked out about the idea,” says Drew. “It was a cool brand and it’s still out there. It’s not our biggest brand, but it was never meant to be.”

That same year, Drew Estate brought in Willy Herrera, the former cigar blender from Miami’s El Titan de Bronze factory, to create a signature, “Cubanesque” blend. Herrera, who is of Cuban descent, made the Herrera Esteli brand, which included a figurado called Piramide Fino that was named *CIGAR AFICIONADO*’s No. 8 Cigar of 2013, a first for Drew Estate.

Next Drew extended MUWAT with Kentucky Fire Cured in 2013. The blend contains Kentucky and Virginia tobaccos—normally used for dry and moist snuff—that have been fire cured over hickory, maple and oak woods. This method infuses it with a smoky quality, similar to a peated Scotch.

By 2014, Drew Estate was producing roughly 25 million handmade cigars per year and had amassed an inventory of more than \$20 million worth of tobacco. Across from La Gran Fabrica Drew Estate, the company opened a new 61,000-square-foot warehouse solely as a tobacco storage

and sorting facility for leaf from Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Brazil, Mexico, Cameroon and Indonesia. Herrera, now officially its master blender, released Norteño. (The Robusto Grande would later become the No. 7 Cigar of 2016, scoring 94 points.)

Additionally, the company mastered the art of the in-store event, employing teams of sales reps who didn’t just sell cigars but established a connection with customers and created a loyal fan base.

“We’ve learned to value our consumers in a very unique way, and it’s noticeable,” says Drew.

“If you take for granted the people who enjoy your products, you don’t get to learn from them and you don’t get to share the experience with them. For God’s sake! We’re all numbers now. You walk into a bank, they don’t care what your name is. You call a big company and you’re only a number now. So, when you can turn around and J.D. can remember a person and take a moment and actually dedicate some of your time back to him. That’s a really big thing.”

And then Drew Estate dropped another bomb on the cigar industry, only it wasn’t a new brand.

**A**bout 30 months ago, Drew Estate announced that it had been acquired for an undisclosed sum by mass-market behemoth Swisher International Inc., best known for making Swisher Sweets and other machine-made cigars.

The move caught loyal fans of Drew Estate and its retail partners by surprise. For Drew, who owned a majority stake in Drew Estate along with Samel, the time had come to sell.

“It was the time because the company had grown so big that I couldn’t finance the damn thing anymore. We grew so fast over the last 20 years that we didn’t have certain stability factors behind us to withstand a trial such as a natural disaster or fire. And that really scared me because I don’t like risks, unless it’s creative risk,” says Drew.

According to Drew, a few companies had approached him with offers to buy out Drew Estate, including another premium cigar company and a

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**“We grew so fast that we didn’t have certain stability factors behind us to withstand a trial. And that scared me.”**

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large cigarette company. But Drew felt that the Swisher deal not only had good timing financially, but that the organization, which is privately owned by the Ziegler family, shares a lot of the same attributes, chiefly provocative brands. “I think that [Swisher] really fought for us because Drew Estate felt good to them,” he says. “They love the company and don’t want to ‘Swisher-ize’ it.”

After the sale, Drew stepped back in his leadership role, becoming more of a brand ambassador, traveling the country and engaging consumers at cigar events. It was during this time that he also “took a deep dive,” as he puts it, into the spirits industry, studying the intricacies of the marketplace and working on making connections. Spirits, particularly Bourbon, had always been dear to Drew, and he had envisioned himself entering that industry. He purchased 10 acres in Orlando, Florida, with the hopes of building a distillery on it. Last April, he debuted three spirits brands under

We were in the state of utter chaos, and we weren’t even Drew Estate for the last two-and-a-half years. It was some concoction.”

Herrera believes Drew Estate strayed from its roots “and what makes us different. Stemming from camaraderie within all the way to the execution of events. The ball was getting dropped a lot and there wasn’t enough communication between teams. Also, egos started getting in the way.”

In January, the company announced that as part of a multiyear deal, Drew had been named president, charged with overseeing the company’s entire portfolio of brands.

Herrera is excited to see Drew return to the company and has great respect for Wolfson. “The biggest thing about Glenn is he’s transparent. There is no more guessing and wondering. Now I know where I stand and what I need to do,” he says. “With Jonathan, his strengths are his marketing ideas and new concepts, along with the execution of those ideas.”

Drew is quick to say that there were some good things to happen in his absence, such as streamlining back-end software for improved efficiencies. “But now we are returning to our core, which is brands, brands, brands!” he says, slamming the bottom of his fist into his open palm.

After much probing, Drew does offer this nugget: “We are considering buying land and farming imminently in our core component areas, which are Nicaragua, Brazil, Connecticut and Mexico.” Growing its own tobacco would be a new—and potentially significant—venture for Drew Estate, which is one of the largest buyers of premium tobacco in the cigar industry.

One plan is for certain: In honor of Liga Privada’s 10-year anniversary, Drew Estate plans to release its “best Liga yet,” says Drew, a Liga Privada Sungrown Aniversario covered in Ecuador Sumatra wrapper. Instead of Liga blue, the color scheme will be mainly black. The idea was to create “something a little milder than Liga Privada,” says Herrera, “because not all smokers can handle the original Liga No. 9 and T52.”

Two sides of Jonathan Drew are immediately evident: the marketing genius and the quirky personality

whose unusual antics come off as brash to some. But if you hang around Drew for long enough, a third side emerges. Underneath all his swagger is a compassionate man who knows how to listen and genuinely cares not only about his customers, but about people. It’s as if he plays a character when talking about cigars, simultaneously an enigma and an open book.

He sits in the offices of CIGAR AFICIONADO, his legs bouncing rapidly up and down. He’s searching through his iPhone for a note he calls “The Forgotten,” a list of his brands that he feels have failed for one reason or another. It includes brands like Kahlua, Nosotros, Cigar Repair, Mayorga, Château Real and numerous others.

“If you can’t connect to your pain, if you can’t connect to your loss, if you can’t connect to your failure, then you can’t stay raw and you can’t keep it real,” says Drew. “It’s a reminder that you ain’t shit. It’s about the team with me. Bringing the brands to life is illustrating the details. I’m going to help the creative forces at Drew Estate have fun again. No one makes cigars better than Drew Estate. I really mean that.” ❖



Following the sale of Drew Estate to Swisher International, Drew took to the road as a brand ambassador for the company, educating consumers about its products at various events.

the company John Drew Brands. One expression in particular stands out. Dubbed Brixton Mash Destroyer in honor of London’s bohemian neighborhood, the liquid is a blend of Kentucky Bourbon and rum made from Florida-grown sugarcane.

In his absence, a shakeup was happening for Drew Estate. In July 2016, on a day that most of the premium cigar industry was traveling to the annual trade show, the company announced that Glenn Wolfson had been hired as the company’s new chief executive officer, replacing Michael Cellucci, who had been at the company for 16 years.

While Drew doesn’t offer any specifics as to what happened, his overall thoughts are that Drew Estate post sale to Swisher had become complacent. “Our aspirations became a little bit focused off of the core characteristics of what distinguished our brands from others. When you have brands like Drew Estate that are so engaging that people believe that they are their brands,” says Drew, passionately. “When we sold Drew Estate [our customers] took it personally. The Drew culture was no longer driven with the hard iron fist of Jonathan Drew. It just was not unified.



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## Cigar Insider

DECEMBER 6, 2016 • VOL. 21, NO. 24 • FROM THE PUBLISHER OF CIGAR AFICIONADO MAGAZINE

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### FEATURED CIGAR

ASHTON SYMMETRY  
BELICOSO

DOM. REP. • PRICE: \$12.25 • BODY: MEDIUM TO FULL

For a full tasting, see page two.

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### TOP 25 CIGARS OF 2016

THE BEST CIGARS OF THE YEAR will be showcased in the February issue of *Cigar Aficionado* along with the top-rated Best Buys and most exciting New Releases of 2016. But don't forget the regular tasting section, where we also rated 83 cigars. For a preview of the issue's top-scoring smokes, turn to page two.



### FIDEL CASTRO: 1926–2016

THE ASHES OF CUBA'S FORMER PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO were interred on Sunday in a tomb that reads "Fidel" on a plaque. He died on November 25 and was cremated before his ashes were brought to Santiago de Cuba, 540 miles southeast of Havana and the birthplace of Castro's Revolution. He ruled Cuba for decades after overthrowing the previous Batista regime in 1959 and has been widely regarded as a controversial figure ever since. Many mourned Castro's death as the passing of a benevolent leader. A few hundred miles away in Miami, others saw him as an oppressive dictator and celebrated his death in the streets. Turn to page five for the obituary.

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## CIGAR WATCH

FROM THE EDITORS OF CIGAR AFICIONADO

SEPT. 27, 2016 | SIGN UP



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### FEATURED CIGAR

Punch Gran Puro Santa  
Rita (91 Points)

The Punch Gran Puro line came onto the scene in 2003 as General Cigar's only Honduran puro, meaning that it uses only tobacco from Honduras. The Santa Rita size (4 1/2 inches by 52 ring gauge, \$5.29) recently impressed our tasting panel with notes of cashew, hints of fresh coconut and a toasty finish, earning a score of 91 points in August's *Cigar Aficionado*.

Click For More Punch Gran Puro Ratings



### 11 Cigars You Should Be Smoking Right Now

*Cigar Aficionado's* 133rd blind tasting, which appeared in our August 2016 issue, is now live on our website. Of the 82 cigars rated by our panel of editors, 11 non-Cuban cigars scored 91 points or higher. These cigars are considered outstanding on our 100-point scale. So if you're heading to your local brick-and-mortar, here are a few cigars that are sure to please right now.

Read Full Story

### La Palina Launches Value-Priced Goldie

La Palina Cigars has shipped a modified version of its popular Goldie blend called Illumination. The cigar features the same component tobaccos as Goldie minus the rare and expensive medio tiempo leaf that's nestled inside the limited-edition line of Goldie cigars.

Read Full Story

La Palina Cigar Ratings

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# The Big Show

*Cigar lovers and industry heavyweights gathered in Havana in March to celebrate the best of Cuba, its tobacco and its culture* BY GORDON MOTT



The annual Festival del Habanos is not just about new cigar releases, like the Montecristo Linea 1935, right. The event showcases local performers. At the closing party David Torrens, Haila, Vania, the group A Otro Tiempo and the outstanding rock violinist Ara Malikian (on stage left) kept guests enthralled.

Is it the gala dinners? Is it the lively entertainment? Is it the daily seminars and trips to the Vuelta Abajo and cigar factories? Is it the launches of new brands and cigars? For most attendees, the annual Festival del Habanos never comes down to a single choice, but a combination of those attractions. The 19th edition, held February 27 to March 3, was no different.

Cigars always lead the way. The 2017 lineup was an interesting combination of an ultra-premium addition to Montecristo (Cuba's biggest-selling brand), a reconceived global strategy for Quai d'Orsay and the anticipated release of individual, special production cigars.

Montecristo will come to market with the Linea 1935, a nod to the year the brand was founded. The cigar will be released initially in three sizes: the Leyenda, in factory jargon, a Montesco No. 1 (6 1/2 inches long by 55 ring gauge); the Maltes, or Sobresalientes (6 by 53); and the Dumas, or Prominente Corto (5 1/8 by 49). According to Habanos S.A., these new cigars are designed to have a fuller flavor profile and more power than

the standard Montecristo brand, which is generally considered a medium-bodied smoke. A test smoke of the Dumas certainly lived up to the description, and it should age extremely well.

Quai d'Orsay was also reintroduced with a new marketing strategy. What was once primarily a French market cigar will now become one of Cuba's global brands. The new concept debuts in three sizes. Two are new additions to Quai d'Orsay: the No. 54, or Edmundo Grueso, (5 3/8 by 54); and the No. 50, or D No. 5, (4 3/8 by 50). The third cigar, a Corona Claro, or Corona, (5 5/8 by 42), is part of the existing Quai d'Orsay brand. In an interesting note, Habanos handed out one of the old sizes of Quai d'Orsay, the Churchill-sized Imperiales, at the Wednesday night dinner honoring the brand. That smoke is not part of the new lineup of sizes in the new look and taste of Quai d'Orsay.

The next big news was the 2017 Edición Limitadas, an annual release of three cigars from the best-known Cuban brands but in vitolas, or sizes, not usually associated with the brands. The Cohiba Talismán, or





## Gordon Mott Named Habanos Man of the Year

Gordon Mott, a 27-year veteran of M. Shanken Communications Inc., the publisher of CIGAR AFICIONADO magazine, was named Habanos Man of the Year in the communications category on March 3 in Havana in front of some 1,200 cigar retailers, distributors, executives and cigar lovers from around the world.

Mott was formerly the executive editor of CIGAR AFICIONADO, having been there at the beginning, assisting editor and publisher Marvin R. Shanken on the creation of the magazine, which has been published continuously since Autumn 1992. He ran CIGAR AFICIONADO for Shanken until 2014, when he moved to Mexico and took on the new role of senior contributing editor. He has traveled to Cuba more than 20 times covering the island nation for the magazine. His work on Cuba—particularly the extensive and illuminating reviews on Cuba's top hotels, restaurants and music clubs in the cover stories on Havana published by CIGAR AFICIONADO in December 2011 and June 2015—has been among the more popular features published in the magazine's recent history.

"I'm deeply honored to have won this award, and to join some of the greatest men in the cigar business who have received it before me," said Mott. "After 25 years reporting and writing about cigars, I know the special nature of the people in the industry, and I'm grateful to be a part of it."

Habanos names three categories of Man of the Year at the Habanos Festival: production, business and communications. The production award was given to Josefa Acosta Ramos, a factory worker. The business award went to London retailer Edward Sahakian, who has owned the Davidoff shop on St. James Street for years and is one of the world's most experienced and learned tobacco retailers.

Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of CIGAR AFICIONADO, was the first person to be named Habanos Man of the Year, in 1995.

—David Savona

Cañonazo Doble, (6 1/8 by 54), led the way for the 2017 ELs. The others were the Partagás Series No. 1, or Nobleza, (5 1/2 by 52) and a Punch Regios de Punch, or Hermoso Especial, (4 3/4 by 48). None of those cigars were given out during the Festival, which is somewhat unusual. If past years are any indication, it may be the end of 2017 before the Edición Limitadas reach the world's retailers.

Habanos S.A. also announced the upcoming Romeo y Julieta Petit Royales, a 3 3/4 by 47 cigar also called a Capricho. Two cigars will be sold only as Casa del Habano exclusives: a 6 1/2 by 52 Trinidad La Trova (Cañonazo Especial), and a 6 by 54 H. Upmann Connoisseur B, or a Geniales.

The Festival also saw the release of the 2017 Gran Reserva, an H. Upmann Sir Winston Gran Reserva 2011, known in factories as a Julieta No. 2. The cigar will have classic Churchill dimensions (7 by 47). It will be released in 5,000 numbered boxes of 20 cigars each. Many Festival goers were disappointed not to get one, because the opening night festivities, when it was handed out, had been almost washed out by rain. Many were erroneously told the event had been called off and so didn't attend.

The full Festival included a visit to tobacco fields in Pinar del Río, which were in the final stages of the harvest. Another day was devoted to educational and historical seminars, and this year's topics included cigars and the arts, a cigar-rolling session taught by a master roller from El Laguito, the mother factory of Cohiba, a history of the Quai d'Orsay brand and a tasting of Spanish brandy with select Cuban cigars. There were also guided tours of two Havana cigar factories, La Corona and H. Upmann, but many people (including the team from CIGAR AFICIONADO) spent that day exploring Havana's best Casa del Habano cigar shops, and savoring some vintage cigars. Friday brought the close of the festival, with the finals of the Habanos Sommelier contest, won this year by Felipe Rojas, of Chile.

The closing dinner Friday night brought together 1,200 people, including the Festival attendees, leading Cuban cigar-industry figures and government officials, as well as other invited guests. They were treated to an evening of nonstop entertainment from top Cuban artists and limitless Montecristo cigars.

The highlight of the evening was the annual live auction of extra-large, custom designed humidors from seven of Cuba's top cigar brands, each one stuffed with cigars. The auction raised 1.265 million euros (\$1.34 million) for Cuba's public health system. The Cohiba humidor was the star of the night, and it brought in 380,000 euros (\$403,000). It was purchased by Leander D'Silva of Apéro, a Canadian company.

D'Silva also bought the Hoyo de Monterrey humidor for 100,000 euros (\$106,000) and the Bolivar humidor for 90,000 euros (\$95,000). Mohamed Mohebi, of the United Arab Emirates, placed the winning bid of 220,000 euros (\$233,000) for the Montecristo humidor, and an H. Upmann humidor sold for 200,000 euros (\$212,000) to Dag Holmboe, the CEO of Pacific Cigar Co. A Romeo y Julieta humidor went to Ricardo Cases, of Andorra, for 150,000 euros (\$159,000) and a Partagás humidor was acquired by Peter Giannoulis from Vancouver, Canada, for 115,000 euros (\$122,000).

D'Silva, the managing director of Apéri, a private members club, revealed that he bought the three humidors for resale to his members. "But the Cuban public health system is a good cause to support," D'Silva added. "It's money well spent." ❖





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Left: ProCigar's White Party is one of the nightly gala celebrations of the Festival. It's held at the Monumento a los Héroes de la Restauración. Right: Illuminated for the Festival, the hilltop Monumento gleams in the night and can be seen from almost anywhere in Santiago.

# ProCigar Holds 10<sup>th</sup> Festival in the Dominican Republic

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

It's like Graceland for fans of Dominican cigars, only with better taste. Or like a Napa Valley of sorts for cigar smokers, only not nearly as expensive. Better yet, the ProCigar festival can be easily described as a Mecca. Field trip by day and party by night, ProCigar is a nearly week-long excursion to the Dominican Republic where cigar fans fly from all over the world for unprecedented access to the buzzing cigar factories and picturesque tobacco fields you only see in cigar ads.

Unlike Graceland, you get to actually meet the people who make your favorite smokes—rock stars for sure in the world of tobacco—and they'll give you more than just an autograph. They'll give you cigars.

In perhaps one of the largest national showings of Dominican pride and cigar solidarity, ProCigar held its 10th festival in the Dominican Republic this year and raised more than \$150,000 with a charity auction. According to the ProCigar organization, the festival hosted around 800 people from more than 20 countries.

The festival is broken up into two parts: Punta Cana and Santiago. The former is the less regimented part of the festival, which plays out more like a beach vacation than a cigar tour. There aren't any strict schedules (save for dinner), and it doesn't become particularly educational until the guests are rounded up and bussed over to Altadis's Tabacalera de Garcia in La Romana—the largest cigar factory in the country.

Afterward, attendees drive across the country to Santiago for the festival's second leg. This is where true cigar immersion begins.

Luckily, most of the Dominican Republic's premium cigar industry is localized in Santiago. If planned properly, one can see a tremendous amount in three days, but multiple tours happen simultaneously, so you have to make a choice. That's not always easy. How does one choose between the grandeur of the Davidoff factory or the history of La Aurora? How can one fully enjoy a day with La Flor Dominicana knowing that

they're missing time with the Quesada family or vice versa? There's only one tour per day, so the cigar enthusiast might find himself in a difficult position. General Cigar, Tabacalera Palma, PDR Cigars—it's impossible to see them all. Even smaller, quaint factories like De Los Reyes and Tabacalera La Alianza take up an entire morning and afternoon.

Altadis and General were more than happy to show off their lush tobacco plantations to the agri-curious, but you get the most for your money on tours where you see both a farm and factory on the same day.

While Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia. did not offer a factory tour, Fuente did showcase its Chateau de la Fuente tobacco farm along with its Cigar Family Charitable Foundation facilities in Bonao.

Various members of ProCigar spoke about the state of the cigar industry at the press conference on the opening day in Santiago. It's always controversial when someone claims to be No. 1 in any field, and usually disputed. But ProCigar's president Henke Kelner was not at all shy about making this assertion.

"In 2016, the Dominican Republic exported 149 million premium cigars to the United States, making us the world's largest exporter of cigars to the U.S.," said Kelner, president of ProCigar and general manager of Tabadom Holding Inc. "If you count our machine-made cigars, the Dominican Republic is the biggest producer of cigars in the world."

The strong sentiment of Dominican cigar exceptionalism was reaffirmed every night with loud music and lots of cigar smoking. Wednesday's evening dinner took place in the gardens of the Gran Teatro del Cibao. Thursday night's White Party (pictured) was held near the marble steps of Santiago's Monumento a los Héroes de la Restauración and the formal closing ceremony was celebrated at the Centro Español where a charity auction of unique humidors raised \$150,000 for the elderly and impoverished citizens of the Dominican Republic. ❖





  
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Or email them to: [momentstoremember@mshanken.com](mailto:momentstoremember@mshanken.com). To order additional copies of CIGAR AFICIONADO, call 1-800-344-0763.



The Vadas family of Hunting Valley, Ohio, celebrate Simon's graduation from Princeton University by savoring a couple of fine Cohiba Esplendido cigars.



Michael Goldstein and John McMillan meet CIGAR AFICIONADO editor and publisher Marvin R. Shanken at Smoke Inn in West Palm Beach, Florida.



Kristy Cameron celebrates her wedding day by sharing fine cigars with her mother Jacqueline aboard their "Cigars & Bourbon Bus" in Toronto, Canada.



Ron Berkowitz, Brian Axelrod, Los Angeles Rams running back Todd Gurley and Evan Lazarus light up Cohibas at Nizuc Resort & Spa in Cancún, Mexico.



The Miller family savors a beautiful March afternoon, enjoying each other's company and pairing libations with fine Drew Estate cigars in Denver, Colorado.



David McLay Kidd marks his wedding day by enjoying a Plasencia Reserva Organica cigar with friends and family at the Mukul Resort in Nicaragua.

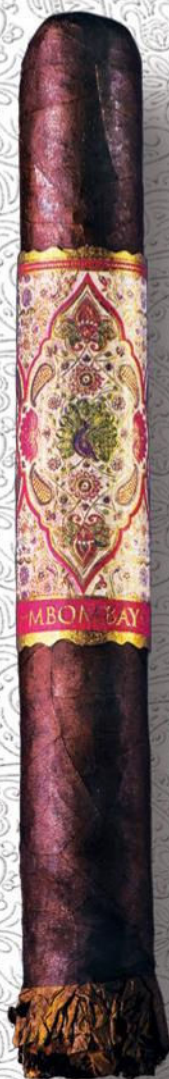


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Brendan Childs, Brian Rismiller, Greg Rismiller and Geoff Wheeler celebrate camaraderie with good beer and great cigars at the Das Best Oktoberfest in National Harbor, Maryland.



Doctors Francesco and Jen Worley mark their wedding day by enjoying cigars alongside Stephen Worley, Tyler McLurg, Robert Ciucevich and Lisa Worley in Wilmington, North Carolina.



Edwin Lowrick, Richard Gondosch, Gary Becker and Randy Gondosch don matching shades while lighting up premium cigars outside Grumpy Gringo Fine Cigars in Tubac, Arizona.





Alexandre Avellar, José Miguel Salvador and a group of cigar-loving friends savor handmade Cuban smokes and good company at La Casa del Habano in Santiago, Chile.



Larry McKivigan, Randy Dvorak, Bob Chambers and Ernie Peters hit the links at Firestone Country Club in Akron, Ohio, with a few Oliva Serie V Melanio cigars to puff while they play.



Mickey Katchmer, Dan Welsh, Brian Smaldino, Mike Herman, Bob Simerlink, Bill Culp and Todd Schuller celebrate Steve Zawrotuk's nuptials with Scotch and cigars in Youngstown, Ohio.



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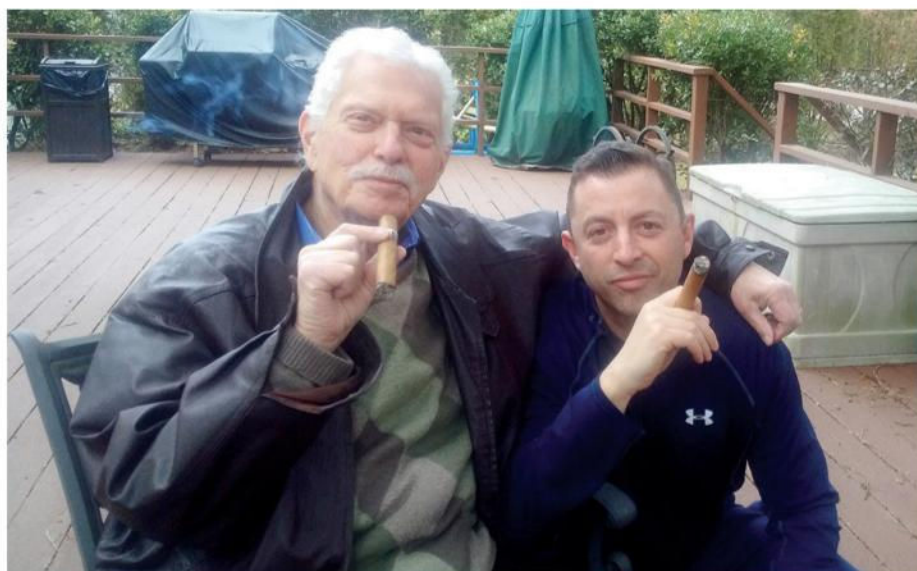
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The Willson and Ware families celebrate the purchase of a new property in southern Colorado by smoking Arturo Fuente cigars. The families have since built a vacation home upon the land.



Friends Jason J. Lukawitz of Smyrna, Tennessee, and Tony Hasselman of Warren, Pennsylvania, catch up over beer and cigars at BLEND Bar with Davidoff Cigars in Nashville, Tennessee.



There's no better way to spend a warm day than with a cigar outside. Rick and Allan Rosenberg savor a 65-degree afternoon in February by puffing on the patio in New Rochelle, New York.





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Captain Paul Kozick and his bride Cassandra enjoy their first cigars as newlyweds alongside their wedding party, family and friends at the Olde Towne Athletic Club in Marietta, Georgia.



Ron Davis finds no better way to celebrate his graduation from Towson University in Towson, Maryland, than by lighting up a premium cigar alongside his mother Beahta and father Ron Sr.



Mike Edwin, Steve Seybold, Jim Fett and Arnie "AT" Thorson share a special round of fine cigars during a memorable fishing trip at Nungesser Lake Lodge in Red Lake, Ontario, Canada.





Howard Hockenberger of Kingston Springs, Tennessee, shares a premium cigar with Rick Rodriguez of CAO Cigars in Estelí, Nicaragua.



Dick Fisher celebrates his 68th birthday by indulging in premium cigars alongside his wonderful family in Scottsdale, Arizona.



Michael Cohen celebrates his wedding to Lindsey Cohen by lighting up fine Montecristo No. 4 cigars with friends and family at the Belle Island Castle in Lisbellaw, County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland.



Sunny Moon and his father Joseph enjoy time together over fine cigars in Calgary, Canada.



Patrick Franco and brother-in-law Andrew Crea savor an Army victory in West Point, New York.

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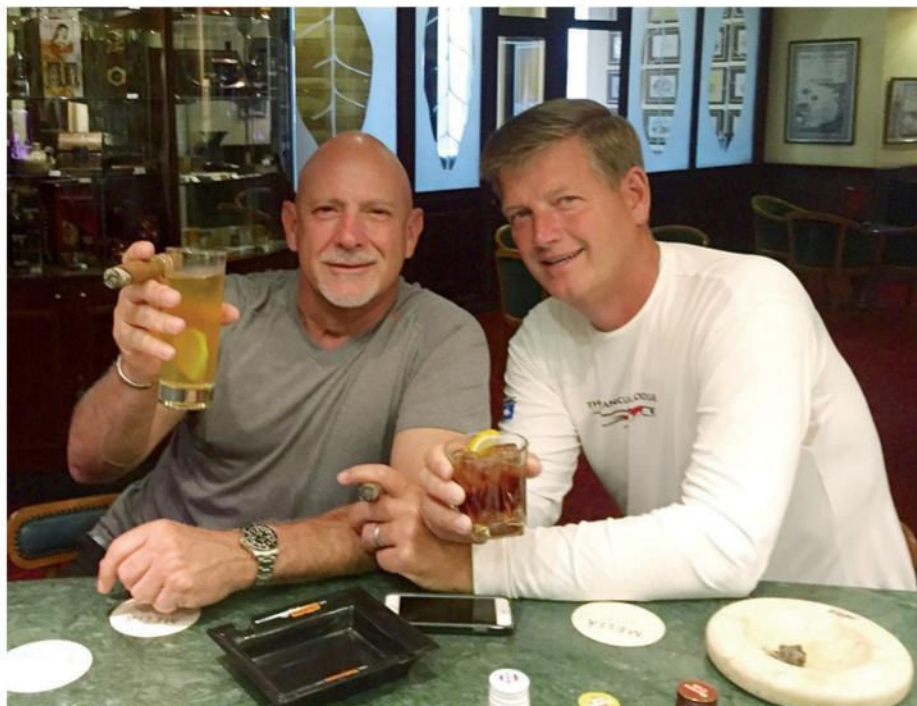


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Don King and Bryan Gentry immerse themselves in the local culture by puffing Cohibas and sipping Havana Club cocktails at the Meliá Cohiba Hotel in Cuba.



Mike Irby, Jeff McGlashan, groom Blake Rogers, Dan Mallon, Steve Rosenfeld and Eric Immerman puff on post-wedding cigars in Loch Ness, Scotland.

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## **1 CIGAR JACKET—DUCA SARTORIA**

Suitmaker Max Girombelli loves cigars, but he hated the way a cigar case would bulge in a suit pocket. So he created the Cigar Jacket, with a leather cigar holder built into the breast pocket. Should you prefer it even more cigar oriented, opt for an inner lining of cigar-band images. As Girombelli works in full custom “Every little detail is possible,” he says. He’s been in New York for 25 years, and operates from a small, well-appointed nook near Grand Central Terminal with a lovely bar and fully stocked humidor. [ducausa.com](http://ducausa.com)

## **2 SPECTACULAR SPEAKERS—SONUS FABER**

Everyone wants music of the highest fidelity, but without proper speakers, even the most advanced stereo components are wasted. In an ambitious reach for sonic perfection Sonus Faber has released its new Homage Tradition series, a complex line of speakers with technological updates and design elements that make them as beautiful as they are resonant. Three models have been engineered to fill your room with clean, detail-rich sound: the 2-way Guarneri (bookshelf, \$15,900), the 3.5 way Serafino (80W–350W, \$21,900) and the powerful, 3.5 way Amati (100W–500W, \$29,000). [sonusfaber.com](http://sonusfaber.com)

## **3 PRESIDENTIAL APPEAL—JFK AND THE MASCULINE MYSTIQUE**

Just in time for his 100th birthday, a new book on John F. Kennedy takes a no-more-tears look at the tragic president, focusing instead on how he changed the cultural landscape with a wink and a swagger. Author Steven Watts argues in *JFK and the Masculine Mystique* (Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin’s Press, \$29.99) that JFK gave new hope to the emasculated suburban man. Bed hopping, Rat Pack parties, boyish pursuits and a kinship with James Bond were all part of his appeal. [us.macmillan.com](http://us.macmillan.com)

## **4 COUNTER-TOP BEER—PICOBREW**

Home-brewed beer sounds great—unless you’re strapped for space. PicoBrew, the company that gave us the more formidable Zymatic brewing system, has shrunk the concept to a size that even apartment dwellers can justify. Not much bigger than a coffee maker, the Pico (\$799) fits on a counter top and is fed by prepackaged ingredients that mirror existing craft beers from throughout the world. Still won’t give up precious kitchen space for a hobby? Did we tell you it doubles as a sous vide machine? [picobrew.com](http://picobrew.com)

## **5 COCKTAIL PAY DIRT—FILTHY FOODS**

Filthy Foods, the not-so-appropriately named purveyor of gourmet cocktail garnishes, is now taking its wares nationwide. The Miami company lifted the status of drink adornments behind the logic that if you’re making your cocktails with the finest spirits and fresh ingredients, why plop in a sad olive or iridescent cherry when you can make the garnish a featured ingredient? Now a store near you should offer an array that includes plump black cherries, and huge olives overstuffed with things like pimentos and blue cheese, as well as pickles, onions and peppers. [filthyfood.com](http://filthyfood.com)

## **6 HIGH STEAKS BEEF—CHIANINA**

Discerning meat-lovers have undoubtedly known terms like Wagyu and Kobe, but one rare choice has eluded much of the dining world—Chianina. The beef comes from the white Italian cattle of the same name, boasting intense flavor without the fatty marbling. Though few ranchers breed them in the U.S., Chianina Steakhouse in California has direct access. Four classic cuts range in price from \$130 to \$200. The standout steak is the classic Bistecca Fiorentina—a Tuscan-style delicacy finally served the way it was intended. [chianina.com](http://chianina.com)



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